THINGS IN THE FOREST

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Christmas 1875

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THINGS IN THE FOREST.

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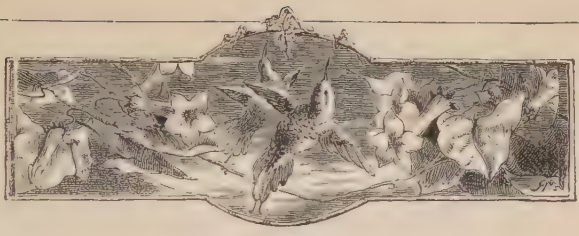
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HUMMING BIRDS


THINGS
IN THE
FOREST
BY
MARY ELIZABETH KIRBY

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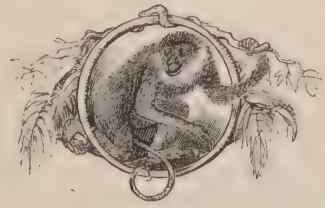
THINGS IN THE FOREST.

BY

Mary and Elizabeth Kirby,

AUTHORS OF "THE WORLD AT HOME," "THE SEA AND ITS WONDERS," ETC.

Gregg



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THINGS IN THE FOREST.

CHAPTER I.

THE BIRD OF PARADISE.



IF you live in the country, I daresay you often go and play in the woods. And very pleasant it is there. You may find the bluebell and the white anemone, and you may see the little squirrel sitting on the branches of the trees, or else leaping from bough to bough. You may think there are no woods so deep and shady as these. The grassy paths may seem like labyrinths; and the stillness so profound, you may fancy, as the poet did, that the spirits of the wood wait and hold their peace while you pass by.

But in hot countries the woods are not like

our woods. They are great dark forests, where the trees grow so thickly together, and are so tall, that if you looked up you could hardly see the sky. Then there are a great many climbing-plants, that twist themselves round and round the trunks and branches of the trees. They are called vegetable cables, because they are so much like ropes; and they reach from one tree to another, and almost fill up the spaces between. The white man has to fight his way with his hatchet, or else burn himself a passage.

Dangers of every kind lurk in the forest. The quick subtle Indian dare not venture without his poisoned arrow, or the white man without the thunder and lightning of his gun. The venomous snake may lie coiled among the bushes, or traces of the savage jaguar be seen upon the path.

Birds, animals, and insects live undisturbed. It is their home; and on every side they are at work, hunting their prey, or escaping from danger. Man is not there to wage war upon them; but these wild creatures of the forest wage war upon each other, and the weak are always using some contrivance to protect themselves from the strong.

There are a great many curious things to be seen in the forest.

In the deepest gloom, where the trees shut out the sun, myriads of lights flit about, and



VIRGIN FOREST.

twinkle like little stars. They flash here and there, and you might fancy that troops

of fairies were carrying torches in their hands. But there are no fairies in the case — the lights are only the torches of the fireflies that live in the recesses of the wood, and every night make a kind of illumination amongst the trees.

Then there are troops of monkeys, that run along the vegetable-cables from one tree to the other, or swing from the branches by their tails, making a noise all the time as if they were talking to each other. When night comes they roll themselves into a ball, all huddled together as close as may be, to keep themselves warm. Sometimes it happens that a few little monkeys have not been alert enough to get into the ball, and are left shivering outside. They keep up a pitiful howling the whole night through, telling the rest how cold and miserable they are, and begging to be let in. But the others are very hard-hearted; they pay no attention, and quietly go off to sleep.

Then there are all sorts of birds, such as we never see in England; or if we do, only in cages. There are flocks of parrots, chattering among the boughs. No birds love the forest more than the parrots do; and the trees seem alive with

their gay plumes of blue and scarlet and emerald-green.

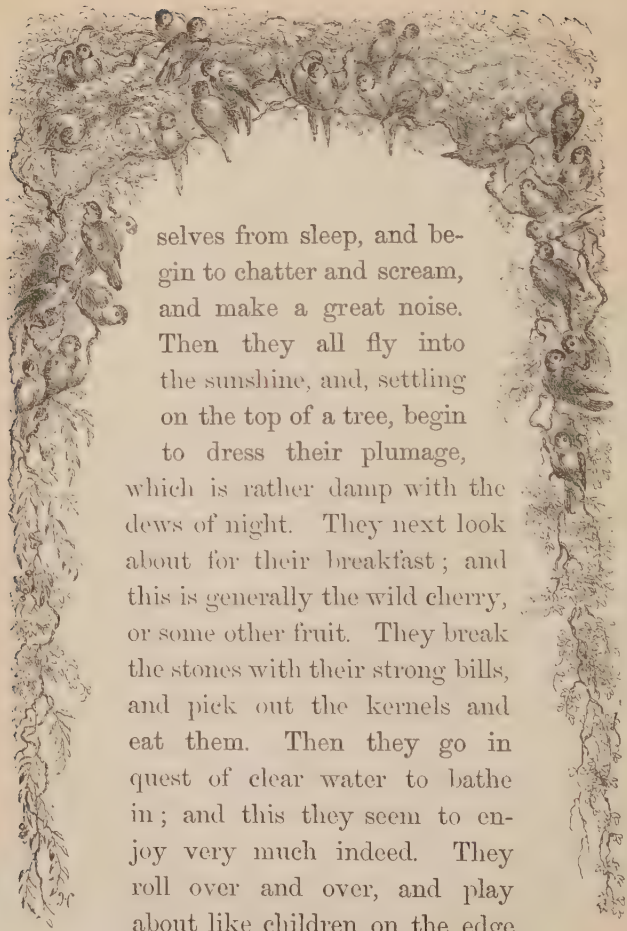
Perhaps you would like to know how the



VEGETABLE-CABLES.

parrots spend the day, when they are at home in their native woods. I will tell you.

Very early in the morning they rouse them-



selves from sleep, and begin to chatter and scream, and make a great noise. Then they all fly into the sunshine, and, settling on the top of a tree, begin to dress their plumage, which is rather damp with the dews of night. They next look about for their breakfast; and this is generally the wild cherry, or some other fruit. They break the stones with their strong bills, and pick out the kernels and eat them. Then they go in quest of clear water to bathe in; and this they seem to enjoy very much indeed. They roll over and over, and play about like children on the edge

of the pool, and dip their heads and wings into the water, so as to scatter it all over their plumage. By this time the sun is getting hot, and they retire to the deep recesses of the forest, where it is always cool and shady. They give over screaming and chattering, and settle themselves on the boughs for a nap; and then the silence is so deep you might hear a leaf drop to the ground, although the trees overhead are crowded with parrots.

But the stillness only lasts through the noontide heat. In the evening the parrots wake up and make as much noise as ever. They sup, as they breakfasted, upon the kernels of the fruits, and then go to the water to bathe. Again follows the business of dressing and pluming their feathers, and after this they go to rest. But they do not roost in the branches, where they took their afternoon's nap; their sleeping-room is a hollow tree, scooped out by the woodpecker. As many parrots get in as the hollow will contain, and the rest hook themselves to the bark, by their claws and bills, and hang there through the night.

The parrot lays her eggs in these hollow trees. She does not make a nest, but lays them on the

rotten wood; and the whole flock lay their eggs together in the same tree.



PARROT'S NEST.

The beautiful woods of the Spice Islands are fragrant with all manner of delicious scents. There lives the Bird of Paradise, that the natives of the country call "God's Bird;" for they think it more splendid than any other he has made; and when I have given you a description of it, I daresay you will think so too.

In the first place, its head and neck are as soft as velvet, and of a golden tint, that changes, while you are looking at it, into all the colours of the rainbow. Then its tail is a magnificent plume of fairy-like feathers, partly white and



BIRD OF PARADISE.

partly yellow, so that you might think they were made of gold and silver. This plume is very much longer than the body, and makes the bird appear larger than it is, for in reality it is only about the size of a pigeon.

We can hardly fancy a flock of these beautiful birds upon the wing, seeming to float at their ease, or else pursuing the large and gaily-painted butterflies that serve them for food. But this is no uncommon sight in that land of flowers and spices—a land that seems just fitted for the home of the Bird of Paradise!

But here, as in all tropical countries, there is a season of rain and storm; and then the birds

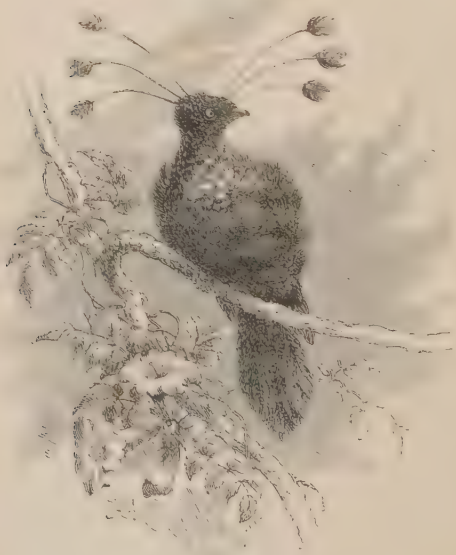
disappear, as the swallows do in England, and seek some sheltered place, or fly to other countries; but when the rain is over, and the spices in the woods breathe out fresh fragrance, they return to their old haunts, and their gay plumes may be seen glittering amongst the trees.

There is one thing that will rather amuse you. When the Birds of Paradise are about to take one of their long flights, they choose a leader to be king over them; and where he goes they go, and where he settles they settle, perching on the same tree. He generally flies high up in the air, above the heads of his subjects, and takes care to lead them against the wind, so that their loose floating plumes may not be blown over their heads. If it comes a storm, they rise higher and higher, and keep mounting until they are out of its reach, and get into a calmer atmosphere. The natives always know the king, because he has spots upon his tail, like the eyes upon the feathers of the peacock. When they go into the woods to shoot the birds, they try to kill him first; and they have a cunning way of hiding themselves in order to get a good shot. They make a little bower of the leaves and branches of the trees, within which they can be

hidden, and yet see all that is going on. The birds are perched round them, suspecting no danger, but there comes an arrow out of this leafy bower, and strikes down first one, and then another, till the natives think they have enough. They cut off the legs, and stuff the bodies with spices, and make a famous trade of selling them to Europeans. People used to fancy, from the legs being always gone, that the bird had no legs at all, and the natives



pretended this was the case; and, what was more miraculous, they said that it had no stomach, and could not take any food. So, for a long time, it was thought to feed on the dew, and never to alight upon the ground. This is why it has been called the "Bird of Paradise."



CHAPTER II.

THE HUMMING-BIRD.



N the woods of the tropics the little sun-bird has its home. It is almost as tiny as the humming-bird, and is called sun-bird, because its wings seem to catch the light, and shine almost as brightly as the sun. It sucks the juices of the flowers with its long slender tongue, and passes from blossom to blossom, uttering a shrill impatient call. But it does not feed upon the wing, and hover over the flower, as the humming-bird does. It settles on the petals; and this it can easily do, for the flowers of the tropics are gigantic compared with ours. Then it puts in its long bill, and, darting out its tongue, picks off first one insect and then another; and when it has had enough, it takes a sip of honey to finish the repast.

The sun-bird is very fond of a tree called the sugar-tree, because at the bottom of the flowers it is sure to find a great quantity of sugary juice. The natives of that country gather the flowers of the sugar-tree, and boil down the juice, and use it, as we do sugar, for preserving fruit. Numbers of little sun-birds are always to be seen perched upon the flowers, sipping honey, or making havoc among the insects, who, like themselves, are fond of sugar.

The sun-bird makes her nest of the down of plants, mixed with a few dead leaves; and the outside wall is all of moss. It looks, when it is finished, like a little ball, rather pointed at the bottom, and the bird makes a cover for it like a hood, that hides the hole where she enters, and prevents it being seen. Sometimes she will build her nest in the hollow of a tree, or else suspend it to a twig, and let it hang in the air, as the tailor-bird does. And what you will think very strange, she has even been known to fix it to a spider's web! The spiders that live in those hot countries are very large and strong, and their webs are more like gauze than cobwebs. So the tiny nest of the sun-bird, as light as a feather, may very well be fixed to one of them without breaking the threads.



HUMMING-BIRDS.

Nothing can be more gaudy than these brilliant little creatures, that sport about in company with the gaily-dressed birds of the tropics. And, like most other birds, they put on their best attire at that season of the year when they choose their partners, and begin to think of building their nests. Then their brightest tints are worn; and they are ornamented with tufts and crests, that afterwards disappear. Indeed, on this occasion they are said to wear their wedding-dress.

The *splendid* sun-bird* is one of the handsomest of the whole tribe. His neck is of golden green, and varies in colour with every changing light. His head and throat sometimes look black, and sometimes of a rich violet. He has a band of scarlet across his breast, and his tail is jet black, edged with golden green.

When he is warbling to his mate, his voice is as sweet as the nightingale's; but it is so low and soft, you must be very near him to hear the song.

The humming-bird is a relation of the sun-bird, but is rather different in his habits; for he hovers over the flower, and sucks the juices, without settling upon it. Poised in the air, he peeps

* *Nectarinia splendida.*

cautiously, with his sparkling eye, into the recesses of the flower, vibrating his wings so rapidly that you can hardly see them. All the time, he makes a low humming sound that is very pleasant to listen to, and that seems to lull the insects within the flower to sleep. Then out darts his long delicate tongue, and takes them up, one after the other; and he finishes, as the sun-bird did, by sipping a little honey.

The humming-bird is as fond of insects as he is of honey, and besides catching them on the wing, he has been seen to steal them out of the spider's web. This is rather dangerous work, for if his wings were to be entangled he would be taken prisoner, and then woe betide him! He has a wholesome dread of the great spider I have just told you about, and if he only shows himself, off the humming-bird darts like a sunbeam; for the spider is as large as he is, and a great deal fiercer. But he can rob the smaller spiders with less danger, and picks out the insects from their webs, snatching them away in a hurry, and then darting off, to come back again the next minute,—and so on, until the poor spider is left with an empty larder.

All the strength of the humming-bird lies in

his wings, which are large in proportion to his tiny body. They are a little like those of the swift in shape,—and everybody knows how rapidly the swift can dart about, and cleave the air with his pinions. The feathers on the quills of the humming-bird's wing are so firmly united that they are almost like a thin plate of whalebone. No air can pass through them, and this is why they make a humming sound, as the bird vibrates his wings.

The humming-bird needs these strong wings to support himself in the air, as his feet are too weak and delicate to perch for any length of time.

And he depends very much upon his wings for safety.

There will come the season of rain and storm, and his little nest will be beaten down, and his home among the trees and flowers be made a wreck. Before this happens, he must fly many long miles to get from beneath the clouds. He looks too fairy-like to undertake such a journey, but his wings are powerful enough to bear him out of reach of danger. They will transport him to other lands, where the storm has passed, and the trees and flowers are blooming as gaily as ever.

The long bill of the humming-bird has been given him that he may search to the bottom of the large tubular flowers, and rifle their sweet juices. But some of these flowers are so bent that a straight bill would not be able to reach the honey; so the bird that feeds upon them has his bill curved upwards at the tip, that he may follow the bend of the flower, and not be disappointed of his feast.



HUMMING-BIRD RIFLING FLOWERS.

The tongue is not unlike the tongue of the woodpecker, and is darted out in the same way, and for the same purpose, of entrapping insects. It is composed of two tubes joined together nearly the whole of their length,

and ending in a spoon-like point. It is very sticky, so the insects when touched by it cannot escape; and it is also fringed with minute spines or bristles, that still further help to secure the prey.

Some humming-birds are much larger than others, and one is called "The gigantic humming-bird,"—a mighty name for such a little creature, as it is only the size of a sparrow. The great humming-bird is very plainly dressed compared to the rest of the tribe, that glitter about in green, purple, and gold, as brilliant as precious stones. There is one little creature, not much larger than a humble-bee, with wings like a butterfly, of snowy white, with large green eyes upon them. His throat is like an emerald, he has a crest of orange on his head, and his tail is purple mixed with green.

Then there is another with two crests upon his head, of a bright orange colour, that changes every minute, and sparkles like a gem. Between the crests, the feathers are of a light blue mixed with green, the throat is of a rich purple, and the breast a pure white.

Some of the humming-birds have very long tails, that make them look all the handsomer. In one little bird, the tail opens out into two

long forks, of a deep orange colour. Each feather is tipped with black, so that when the tail is shut up it looks as if it were barred across with black.

Some have plumes upon the neck, that they can set up like a ruff or collar. This ruff is generally of a carmine-red, often mixed with violet.

The forest, with its great trees covered with climbing plants and flowers, swarms with these brilliant little creatures.

"Like fairy sprites, a thousand birds
Glance by on golden wing,
Birds lovelier than the lovely hues
Of the bloom wherein they sing."

No wonder the ancient Mexicans stole the plumage of the humming-birds to adorn their mantles; and very superb these mantles were, sparkling with the many-coloured tints I have been describing; and the Mexican youth thought he could make no more costly present to his bride, than the gorgeous crest of the humming-bird, to be worn amongst her hair. Even now, the Indian women hang the tiny bodies of the humming-birds to their ears, instead of ear-rings, and on their head-dresses, instead of jewels.

The humming-bird, though so small, is very brave, and will attack a bird three or four times his own size. It is no pleasant thing to come in

the way of his long bill, for he always pecks the eyes of his assailant.

When he is keeping watch over the nest, he is particularly fierce, and if another bird happens to come near, he darts out, screaming with rage; his throat swells, and his wings expand to their fullest extent, and he looks like a little fury. He gives battle to the intruder, and the two birds fight desperately, until one of them falls to the ground exhausted, and so ends the conflict.

I am afraid the humming-bird is a very passionate little fellow. He will even go into a rage with a flower that does not please him, or has not so much honey in it as he expected; and then he tears it to pieces and scatters it with his bill and claws.

Perhaps the best part of his character comes out when he is helping his little partner to build their nest. He brings her all the materials, and flies about collecting them with the greatest industry. The tiny nest is generally hung to the end of a twig of the orange or pomegranate tree, and is completely hidden by one of the large leaves that overhangs it, and forms a canopy. The nest is sometimes made entirely of thistle-down; and the prickly burs of the thistle are stuck outside to

protect it. But moss and cotton are used quite as often, with dead leaves woven in among them.



NEST OF HUMMING-BIRD.

The cotton grows upon a tree called the silk-cotton tree, and I must tell you something about it. It is a very large tree indeed, and is looked upon by the black people* with great veneration. They never venture to throw a stone at it, and when they are obliged to cut it down they pour some wine at its root, in order to prevent its being angry, and doing them any harm. It is one of the few trees that

* Of Africa and the West Indies.

shed their leaves ; for a tropical forest is always green and full of foliage, as the new leaves come out before the old ones drop.

But every other year the silk-cotton tree stands quite bare, and without a single leaf; and then its trunk and great branches are dotted all over with seed-pods. As soon as the pods are ripe they burst, and out comes a quantity of fine silky down, that is carried away by the wind. It cannot be used as cotton, for it will not twist or hold together, and all that can be done with it is to stuff pillows and mattresses. But, as it floats hither and thither, it is a rich harvest for the little humming-birds. Hundreds of them may be seen darting about, pursuing the tufts of down, and carrying them away in their bills. When the nest is made, the mother-bird lays two eggs in it, no bigger than peas, and of a snow-white colour, speckled here and there with yellow.

She and her mate sit upon the nest by turns, and never leave it a moment. At the end of twelve days the two little humming-birds come out of their shells, and are about the size of blue-bottle flies. At first they are unfledged, but very soon are covered with down ; and in time, feathers grow upon them, and become as beautiful as those of the parent birds.

CHAPTER III.

THE PIGEONS.



BESIDES the noisy chattering parrots, with their gaudy plumage, there is a tribe of birds in the forest as richly dressed as they are, and that love their home in it quite as well. These are the pigeons, who luxuriate amid the thick foliage of the trees, and are particularly fond of the banyan, that, as you know, sends down its myriads of shoots to the earth, and makes a little forest of its own. Here the pigeons find a safe and pleasant retreat, and an abundant supply of food in the figs it bears. They also live upon the palm, that rears its stately head among the other trees of the forest. The fruit of the palm is as unfailing as that of the banyan; for Nature is prodigal of gifts to her children in those sunny climes.



BANYAN-TREE.

I daresay you think the pigeon cannot be compared with the parrot in the beauty of its plumage, and wonder I should call it richly dressed. But like everything else in a tropical country, the pigeons seem to borrow tints from the glowing sky, the shining foliage, and the brilliant flowers around them.

Their plumage shines with a metallic lustre,

and glitters, as that of the humming-bird does, like gold and silver. It has the same property of varying in colour with every movement of the bird, as he rustles about among the branches. In one light, his feathers look blue, in another, green or violet, or even black, and this adds not a little to his beauty.

The pigeon* that lives upon the banyan-tree is green, like the leaf; but his eyes and feet are of a brilliant red, and he climbs a little as the parrots do. A flock of these birds, perched in their shady bower, may escape notice, for their plumage is so like the foliage that no one can see them unless they move. And they do not care to leave their retreat while the small red figs of the banyan are always within their reach.

The forests of India, and the beautiful woods of the Spice Islands, about which I have already spoken, abound with pigeons of gorgeous colours. They are worthy neighbours of the Bird of Paradise, and, like it, feed upon the precious spices that grow on every hand. The head of one is adorned with a crest of blue feathers, that always stand erect, and spread open like a fan. It is larger than the other pigeons, and is called the crowned

* *Columba Aromatica.*

pigeon, because of the crown upon its head, that makes it look like a king. It has more than once been brought to Europe, and people have tried to rear it; but it cannot live if taken from its native woods, and pines away and dies.

The nutmeg is a favourite food with some of the spice-eating pigeons, or rather its soft covering and shell, that you know by the name of mace. They thrive amazingly upon this diet, and become so fat, that when they are shot they will often burst as they fall to the ground.



NUTMEGS.

And here I must tell you a rather curious fact. The pigeons swallow the nutmeg, with its covering of mace; but the nutmeg, released from its shell, passes uninjured through the body of the bird, and is dropped out as it flies. At certain times of the year, the pigeon is a great traveller; so that the nutmeg is dispersed over the islands of

the east, where it would not otherwise have been planted. And what is more curious still, the nutmeg could never be made to grow unless it had gone through this process of being swallowed. Many attempts were made to rear it, without success; but in these days, when people find out everything, it has been discovered that if the nutmeg is steeped in a preparation of lime it will do as well.

And I can tell you another thing that is rather odd. Many of the pigeons, when they are going to choose partners, and make their nests, have a round ball, or gristly knob, grow upon the bill, just where it joins the head. It stands up like a cherry, or even larger, and when the days of courting are over it disappears, and no one could tell where it had been.

Perhaps this curious ball may be considered very handsome among the pigeon tribe, and render them more attractive in each other's eyes.

The pigeon is a very timid bird, and loves its home so well that, if taken away, it will fly many hundred miles to get back to it.

Man has taken advantage of this circumstance to employ it as a messenger; for he knows that if it is going back to its native place, no distance,

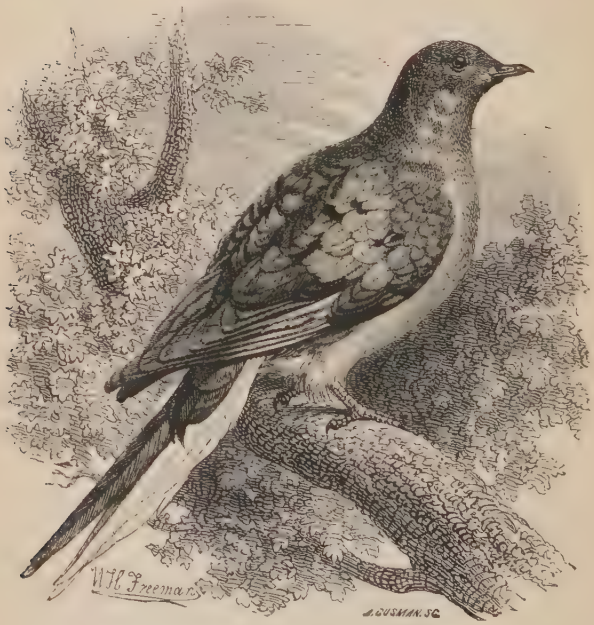
and no difficulties, will stand in its way. He knows, too, it will fly as direct as if it were guided by the compass; and in days of old, when there were neither railways nor telegrams, the pigeon was the swiftest messenger that could be found.

One of the Turkish sultans devised a regular system of carrying news by means of a number of pigeons, trained for the purpose. He built a great many high towers, about thirty miles apart, and at each tower pigeons were kept. They used to fly from one tower to another, and sentinels were on the watch to receive them. The letter was written on a very thin strip of paper, and inclosed in a tiny gold box, as thin and light as the paper itself, which was hung round the neck of the bird. The hour of its coming and going was marked at each of the towers; and, to avoid any mishap, a second pigeon was always despatched an hour or two after the first, and bearing a copy of the letter. This winged post was very swift, and very punctual; the bird flew at the rate of forty miles an hour, and if it had young ones to return to, it would fly swifter still.

I might tell you many stories of the carrier-pigeon:* how, in a besieged city, every avenue

* *Columba Turcica Vulgaris.*

might be blocked up, and sentinels keep guard round it, day and night; but in some unlucky moment a carrier-pigeon would hover over it, and



THE CARRIER-PIGEON.

then suddenly drop down, and bear to its master the glad tidings of relief; and high-born dames, in the olden days of chivalry, when fighting was

always going on, used to look from their lattices for the return of the pigeon that was to bring them tidings of their knights; and the poet, who never fought except in verse, delighted to send his sonnets to his lady-love suspended round the neck of the pigeon.

In the East (where things remain much more stationary than they do in England), and indeed in many parts of the world, the pigeon still goes backwards and forwards on its errand; and people look out for it with as much anxiety as they did centuries ago.

But, perhaps, I can interest you the most by telling you about the wild pigeon of America, that is called the passenger-pigeon.* It is a handsome-looking bird, with a very long tail, and a dark red body; while the wings and back are green and purple, spotted with black.

These pigeons live together in such incredible numbers that there is nothing like it in nature. More than forty miles of forest is entirely covered with them; and if you were to go into one of these pigeon regions, you might think an army of soldiers had encamped there. The grass and underwood are trampled down; great boughs, that

* *C. Migratoria.*



PASSENGER-PIGEONS

have been broken from the trees by the weight of innumerable pigeons, lie strewed about; and the trees themselves are as completely killed as if the woodman had been there with his axe.

When the pigeons have made one tract of forest a scene of ruin, and eaten up all the beech-nuts, they go to another. They fly in a vast army, several pigeons deep, and high enough to be out of reach of a gun.

A traveller was once going down the river Ohio, and went on shore for provisions. While he was bartering, there came on a sudden darkness, and a loud rushing sound was heard that he thought must be a tornado. He expected the houses, and everything in the neighbourhood, to be overwhelmed; when, to his great relief, the person he was talking to said quietly, "It is only the pigeons!"

Another traveller sat and watched one of these mighty armies passing on its way. The air was literally filled with pigeons. On they flew, in one continued column, legion after legion; and very beautiful they looked, as their plumage glistened in the sun. At one moment it was a sheet of azure, then it was a mass of rich purple, changing every instant with the light. Sometimes they swept round in circles, as if taking a survey of the country, to see what there was to eat. Then they alighted; but in an instant, as if alarmed, rose again, and the flapping of their wings made

a roaring noise like thunder. Now, they lowered their flight over the woods, and were lost to sight among the trees; and then, emerging, glided onward as before.

All this time the noise was so great that horses on the roads took fright, and people could only make each other hear by shouting at the pitch of their voices.

Hawks and other birds of prey were attracted in great numbers by the scent of pigeons, and sailed about, trying to attack them in the rear. Then the pigeon army went through a series of manœuvres to escape them, forming itself into a solid mass, and moving up and down, and from side to side. Now, it nearly touched the ground, and then, rising high up in the air, wheeled and twisted about, till it looked like the coils of a gigantic serpent. For three whole days, this army of pigeons kept on passing; and well it might, for the traveller calculated it to be a mile in breadth, and no less than two hundred and forty miles in length!

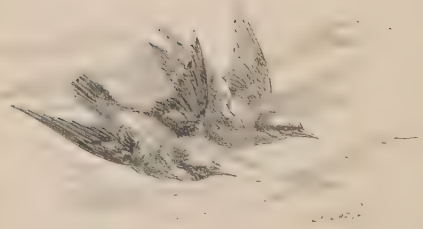
The mighty forests of America can never be exhausted, or the supply of food would fail for such a countless host!

Hunger at length brings the pigeons to the

ground, and they begin to throw about the withered leaves in quest of beech-nuts. The pigeons in the rear keep flying over the main body, and alighting in the front; and this goes on so quickly that it looks as if the whole flock were on the wing. Very soon they clear the ground of acorns and beech-nuts so completely that not one is left. Then they rise, and pursue their way, until they reach the tract of forest to which they are going, and they rush into it with tremendous noise and confusion. They beat the trees with their wings to knock down the nuts, and, in course of time, make a scene of desolation as complete as the one they left.

When the people of the country hear that the pigeons are flying, they turn out to shoot as many as they can. Besides this, the fowler uses a decoy to entrap them. He conceals himself in a little hut of branches; and close by, he fastens four or five pigeons to a stick, and strews plenty of corn round them. He has a string tied to the stick, and keeps pulling it, so that the pigeons flutter up and down, and seem as if they were alighting. The flock overhead are deceived, and think they may alight too, especially as they see the ground

strewed with corn. But this is about the worst thing they can do; for no sooner have they settled, and begun to pick up the corn, than the fowler draws his net over them, and takes them prisoners.



CHAPTER IV.

BEING LOST IN THE FOREST.



YOUNG people always like to hear adventures; and I cannot do better than devote this chapter to the true story of a soldier, who was lost for some days in one of the forests of Ceylon. It will give you an idea of what the interior of the forest is; for the poor man, after his rescue, described very vividly a few of its scenes, and of its inhabitants, such as he little desired ever to have witnessed.*

Now, this soldier was very fond of making short excursions into the forest; and one evening he set out, intending, as usual, to keep upon the outskirts, and to return before it was dark. But as he was walking along, a peacock ran across the path, and he was seized with a desire to catch it.

* For the *substance* of this narrative we are indebted to Lieutenant Campbell's "Ceylon."

He ran after it, pelting it with stones; and became so much interested in the chase, that he forgot where he was, and entangled himself in the mazes of the forest. Then he gave up all wish for the peacock, as well he might, and thought only of how to find his way back!

But it was something like getting into a labyrinth. No path was to be seen; and the best thing he could do was to climb a tree, and ascertain in which part of the sky the sun was setting, that it might be a guide to him. But the trees were tall and thick, and he could not see anything of the sun, or catch even his faintest gleams. So he descended in haste, dreading lest night, with her attendant dangers, should overtake him in this wilderness.

But, alas! an enemy met him at the very outset. He was trespassing on the domain of beasts, and birds, and reptiles, and could expect nothing less than encounters with them. And so it was that at this moment a lordly elephant stood full in his way, listlessly flapping his ears and swinging his trunk, as they always do when they stand still, to drive away the flies.

The elephants lead a very pleasant life in these great forests, bathing in the rivers that meander

through them, or rolling their gigantic bodies on the luxuriant grass. The young tender branches afford them a constant supply of food, and they can tear them down with their trunks from the loftiest trees. The other animals treat the elephant with respect, on account of his superior size. Even the tiger does not care to attack him; for, if he did, he would be received upon his tusks, and tossed into the air. The female elephant has no tusks, and cannot toss her enemy; but, what is quite as fatal, she has a habit of throwing herself upon him, and stamping him to death with her feet.

Man is the most powerful foe the elephant has to dread. He kindles a fire, and the huge animal is struck with terror at the mysterious light that blazes amongst the trees, and flies before it, trampling down everything in his way; or else he digs a pit, and covers it over with turf, and the elephant falls in, and is caught as in a trap. When he has expended his strength in useless struggles, he seems to give up the contest, and becomes the docile servant of his captor. Or he lets fly his poisoned arrow, and the animal falls, crashing the trees, and making the very ground tremble with his weight.

It often happens that, when an elephant is alone, he has been driven from the herd, and is not in the best of humours. At all events, the soldier was afraid to pass him. He had no desire to feel the tread of his great foot, that would crush the strongest man as easily as a cat would crush a mouse. So he slipped out of his way, and struck off in another direction. This new path seemed more open than the other; but in reality it led him deeper and deeper into the mazes of the forest. He fancied he heard the elephant coming after him, and ran as fast as the prickly brushwood would let him. To add to his alarm, it began to get dark, and he felt that he should have to spend the night alone in the forest!

The thought was a very terrible one. The wild beasts would by-and-by come out of their dens, and roam in search of prey. He had no blazing fire to keep them at a distance; no poisoned arrow to shoot them with, no weapon of defence. What was to become of him?

One thing was certain,—he must climb a tree, and spend the night amongst its branches. But the trees were not so easy to climb; their stems were tall and straight, and shot up to a vast

height without a single branch. The natives often cut steps in the trunk with a hatchet; but he had no hatchet, and was obliged to wander about until he found a tree with branches low enough for him to reach. Then he scrambled up as high as he could get, and held a stout stick in his hand, to defend himself against the bears; for some bears, he knew, could climb as well as a cat.

He could not go to sleep, nor was it very likely he should; for, in the clear moonlight, he saw the elephants and other animals roaming about, and even passing close by the tree on which he was perched. He was glad indeed when morning came, and he could make another attempt to find his way out of this gloomy forest!

But after several hours walking and running, he became more bewildered than ever, and at last sat down upon a fallen tree, completely worn out.

He had scarcely sat two minutes, when a snake with a curious mark on the back of its neck, something like a pair of spectacles, raised its head, and looked at him in a threatening manner. It was evidently provoked that any one should dare to sit down so near it, and it puffed out its neck like a hood. The soldier knew too well

what kind of enemy he had to deal with; it was the spectacle, or hooded snake,* and one of the most deadly of its tribe.

Strange as it may seem, the natives of Ceylon



COBRA DE CAPELLO.

regard the hooded snake with veneration. They think it is as powerful as their gods, and that it belongs to another world, and only comes here as a visitor. They never kill one if they can help

* Cobra de Capello.

it; and when it gets into their houses, they contrive to put it in a bag, and carry it away to a distance.

The hooded snake never bites unless it is provoked; and then it gives warning of its intention by puffing out its neck, moving its head from side to side, glaring with its eyes, and making a loud hissing.

All this it was doing at the present moment; and the soldier, fully expecting it to dart upon him, took to his heels and ran away.

He continued running until he was out of breath; and then found himself in a more open part of the forest. A number of fallen trees lay upon the ground, as though a hurricane had torn them up and tossed them there. This was just the place for snakes, and a great many, of different kinds and colours, were gliding in and out among the prostrate logs. They made off as fast as they could, and disappeared among the bushes; but still the soldier halted, and dared not proceed a step further. A great brown and yellow snake, as thick round as his body, and nearly thirty feet long, lay coiled upon the ground. It did not attempt to stir, but raised its head, and fixed its keen eyes upon him. It was the terrible rock



SNAKE SEIZING DEER.

snake,* of which so many marvellous stories are told. Its powerful jaws can open so wide as to swallow a deer, or even, it is said, a buffalo, at one mouthful. This great snake, strong as it is,

* Python.

does not move very quickly, and catches its prey by cunning. It lies in the track where the deer are accustomed to pass, and as they go by, it catches hold of them by two sharp horny spurs that grow upon its body, near to the tail.

The soldier knew this snake as well as he had done the other, and felt very anxious to get out of its way. So he crept cautiously back, treading as lightly as he could on the fallen trunks, which crumbled to pieces under his feet, and dreading every minute to be bitten by the snakes that lurked inside them.

And now, to his great joy, he came upon the banks of a river, and the sight was very reviving to him. He could quench his thirst and bathe his temples; and he hoped, by following its course, to meet with natives, or to find his way out of the forest. He had only gone a few yards, when he heard a loud chattering overhead, and looking up, saw a crowd of monkeys grinning and grimacing at him. They were a merry group, and seemed to be enjoying themselves in their leafy home.

And, indeed, nothing can be more pleasant than the life of the monkeys in their native forests. From the tops of the trees they look

securely down on the lion, the tiger, and the elephant, and even pelt them with cocoa-nuts, when they are in the humour for mischief. But they are terribly afraid of the snake. For the snake will come, wreathing itself up the tree, when they are least aware of it; and woe be to the monkey that is taking his afternoon's nap! He will be snapped up and swallowed before he has time to make any defence!

In these great forests, the trees are often so matted together that the monkeys can travel for miles and miles along the tops of them, without coming to the ground; and when they come to a river they have a very ingenious way of getting over it. There are no bridges, and they can neither swim nor fly; how do you think they manage it? They make a chain bridge of their own bodies! One monkey tightly links himself to his neighbour, and they let themselves swing. A third steps on their bodies, and clasping the second, makes another link in the chain. This goes on until the chain is long enough to reach across the river, and then the last monkey swings himself upwards, and by a violent effort grasps the tree on the opposite bank. Over this living bridge the rest of the monkeys cross, and the



A MONKEY BRIDGE.

danger of falling into the stream does not prevent them giving each other sundry nips and pinches.

When all are safely landed, the monkey that made the first link lets go his hold, and the bridge falls gently down upon the opposite bank.

The trees in which the monkeys were chattering were loaded with cocoa-nuts; and, as the soldier was very hungry, he longed to get some of them to eat. He intended to make the monkeys throw them down to him; and began to pelt them with stones, knowing very well that they would pelt him with nuts in return. And so they did,—pulling them off the trees, and flinging them at him with all their might. He contrived to dodge out of the way and escape a broken head; and then picked up his nuts and ran off with them.



COCOA-NUTS.

The forest became wilder and wilder, and the darkness gave him warning that he should have to spend another night there. This time, he thought, he would tie himself into the tree, so that he might, if possible, get a little sleep without being in danger of falling. The cord he used

was one of the vegetable-cables I told you about in the first chapter, and that is as tough and strong as rope. He might have had a better night, but his clothes were soon saturated with the heavy and chilling dew that falls in these tropical countries. And by-and-by he heard a loud barking and howling that was almost deafening. It was the jackals in close pursuit of their prey.

The jackals are more voracious than the wolves, and will attack everything they meet with. All day they are hidden in their dens, but when night comes, they issue forth in packs, and scour the forest round. The jackal that first scents the prey gives notice to the rest by a loud howl, and all the pack answer him. The lion often hears the cry, and follows at a distance. Then, when the jackals have run down their prey, and are just going to devour it, in the lion steps, and the jackals have to give place, and wait until he has satisfied his hunger.



JACKAL.

The poor soldier had no chance of sleep in the midst of all this noise. As soon as it was light, he came down from his roosting place, and continued his way along the river. But very soon the bank became so covered with jungle and prickly shrubs, that he was obliged to take to the water and wade. It was very fatiguing work; and when he came to a more open place, he lay down upon a rock, and in spite of the glaring rays of the sun, that beat full upon him, he sank into a deep sleep. When he awoke, he had a terrible fright: close beside him were the foot-marks of tigers, freshly made upon the soft mud. They had evidently been there while he was asleep, and he had been quite at their mercy. His escape seemed almost miraculous, and he did not leave the spot until he had kneeled down and thanked God for it.

He was now very hungry; and seeing the peacocks feeding on some red berries, he thought he would venture to try them. But they were sour and disagreeable, and he did not think it prudent to eat many of them.

By-and-by he was better off; for he came to some cocoa-nut trees, growing in a cluster on the river's bank. Hundreds of parrots, with bright

green, yellow, and red plumage, were flying about amongst the branches, and kept up such a harsh screaming that they almost drove him distracted; and there were numbers of brilliantly-dressed birds, with bills as large as their bodies, and that looked so heavy, you wondered how they could carry them. These were the toucans; and so far from being incommoded by the weight of their bills, they were hopping about as nimbly as the parrots. In fact, the bill is very light, and consists of a delicate network of bone, covered over with a horny coating. The tongue is long and narrow, and as stiff as whalebone; it is fringed on each side with filaments, so as to look like a feather, and can be darted several inches beyond the bill.

The toucan feeds upon fruit and spices; but he is not satisfied with a wholly vegetable diet. He devours mice and small birds, and has a great liking for eggs,—cunningly driving away the parents, and then regaling himself on the contents of the nest. When he seizes his prey, he jerks it up into the air and catches it up again in his wide bill, and, by a few squeezes, kills it. Then he dexterously breaks the bones, and swallows it piece by piece, not even leaving

the beak and legs, if it happens to be a bird. All the while he makes a hollow chattering noise with his bill, as if exulting over his meal.

The nest of the toucan is in the hollow of a tree; and when he goes to roost he turns his tail up over his back, and nestles his great bill on his shoulder, until it is quite concealed among the feathers.



THE TOUCAN.

He is as noisy as the parrot, and altogether they made such a din, that the soldier was glad to get out of their way. Happily for him, the elephants had been there before him, tearing down the branches; and numbers of cocoa-nuts lay strewed upon the ground. On these he made a good supper, and tied himself into the tree for the night. The moon shone in all her splendour, and he could distinctly see the animals come down to the river to drink.

And here I might tell you that in hot countries the creatures in the forest have, at all times, an

abundance of food; but every now and then there comes a drought, and the supply of water is cut off. Rivers and lakes dry up under the burning rays of the sun; and the animals, parched with thirst, wander a long way in search of something to drink. When they have found a spring, they all draw up on its banks, for they must drink or die. The elephants march, in a long line, from the depths of the forest; the buffaloes come in a herd, depending on their numbers for safety. The lion and the tiger meet each other face to face; and the smaller animals, such as the jackal and the timid deer, venture to the water's edge, though it is as much as their lives are worth. The snake, too, is there, taking possession of the bank, and seizing as much prey as he can get. Like the rest of his tribe, he sleeps with his eyes open, and seems for ever on the watch. Fierce battles take place every hour, and the weak fall victims to the strong. But the snake is always able to defend himself; his scales are like armour, and no animal cares to venture near him and run the risk of being crushed to death in his coils.

The next day, the soldier lived upon his cocoa-nuts; dashing them against the trees to break the shells, though by doing so he was obliged

to waste the milky juice. When he had eaten as many kernels as he could, he put the rest in his wallet.

All at once he thought he heard men shouting, and made for the place, overjoyed at the prospect of meeting with human beings. But, alas! the sound died away, and was not repeated; and after running about a mile without seeing any trace of his fellow-creatures, he found himself more than ever entangled in the forest. He began to retrace his steps towards the river, but to his great alarm three elephants were standing full in his way. One of them was a young one, and came frolicking up to him as if in play. He ran back, and looked round for a tree to climb; but in his haste to get out of its reach his foot slipped, and he fell from the tree right under the elephant's nose. The elephant stopped, touched him, smelled him, and even turned him over with its trunk. The soldier was very much afraid it would trample upon him; and, jumping suddenly up, he gave such a shout that the elephant was scared, and ran back to its companions. Then all the three came rushing towards the soldier, bending and breaking everything before them. But fear lent the



A DANGEROUS POSITION.

soldier wings, and he ran so fast that he soon left them behind him. Unfortunately he had

left his wallet behind him, with all his cocoa-nuts in it; and he would have lost his dinner, if he had not come upon another fruit that did as well.

This was the fruit of the jack-tree, that is so large it weighs as much as seventy pounds, and contains more than two hundred seeds, or nuts, that are a little like chestnuts. The natives of Ceylon use it for food, cutting it in slices, and frying it in oil, or else eating it raw.

The soldier tried to make a fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together; but he rubbed a long time, and could not get a spark. So he loaded himself with jack fruit, and went on in better spirits at having found such an abundant supply of food. But just at this minute he heard a loud grunting, and found that he was almost in the midst of a herd of wild boars.

The wild boars are very ferocious animals; while they are young, they form themselves into a phalanx, the weakest in the middle, and the strongest facing the danger; and in this way they defy every other animal. But when the wild boar has come to maturity, he walks the forest fearless and alone. Hunting him is the favourite amusement in Ceylon. The hunter is

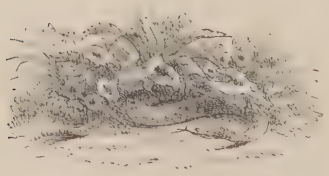
mounted on horseback, and thrusts at the boar with a long spear, taking care not to let it go out of his hand. But he often gets the worst of it; for the enraged animal will charge so furiously, as to drive both hunter and dogs off the field.

The soldier swam across the river, to get out of the way of the wild boars. When he reached the opposite bank he was very much exhausted; and sitting down he began to think over the many escapes he had had. Then some texts of Scripture, that his mother had taught him when he was a child, came into his mind, and comforted him. They were out of Psalm cxxxix. :—

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

The soldier continued wandering about in

the forest some days longer, but did not meet with any more adventures worth relating. He became so weak, that at last he could not climb the trees, but lay down at the foot of one of them, and sank into a deep sleep. Here he was found by some natives, who had come into the jungle to look for their cattle that were gone astray. They roused him from his sleep; but he was not able to stand, and seemed as if he had lost his senses. They carried him away to the hospital, where every attention was paid to him. He slowly recovered his reason and his health; and when he was quite well, related his marvellous escapes in the forest, which I have related to you.



CHAPTER V.

THE TAILOR-BIRD AND THE ORIOLE.



THE birds in a tropical forest are exposed to many dangers; and if they were not gifted with instinct, they would soon fall victims to their enemies. The monkeys are lying in wait for their eggs, and so is the snake, that glides stealthily amongst the bushes.

The mother bird knows very well what she has to expect if either of these cunning foes should find entrance into her nest; and she generally contrives to conceal it so skilfully that neither snake nor monkey can find it.

The tailor-bird of India is no bigger than the humming-bird, and has a long slender bill, which she uses as a needle. She is very timid and cautious, and will not hang her nest, as many birds do, to the end of a bough. Even there she

does not fancy it will be safe; so she fastens it to the leaf itself, and so carefully that no one can see it.

First of all she picks up a dead leaf from the ground, and then with her needle and thread (her needle being her bill, and her thread the fibres of a plant) she sews the dead leaf to the side of a living one, and in the space between she makes her nest. Small as the space is, it is quite large enough for the tiny eggs she lays; and she lines it with gossamer, that the little tailor-birds may feel themselves quite snug and comfortable. The leaf, with the nest sewed into it, swings about in the wind as it did before, for the weight of the bird does not draw it down in the least. It is hidden from the prying eyes of the forest robbers; and here the young brood are hatched in safety. You might see them put out their heads when they are expecting their mother back with an insect or a worm for their food. But at the slightest sound of danger, in they draw them, and there seems to be nothing but the leaf hanging with the other leaves upon the bough.

Another little bird, called the Indian sparrow, is equally ingenious. She builds her nest on the highest tree she can find, and if it overhangs a



TAILOR-BIRD AND NEST.

river she is so much the better pleased. She makes it of grass, which she weaves like cloth, and fashions it into the shape of a bottle; it contains several apartments, and the entrance is at the bottom.

The oddest thing about it is that the bird is said to light up her rooms with fireflies, which she sticks to the walls by pieces of clay. Sometimes three or four fireflies have been found in the nest; and there have been many conjectures as to what she does with them. One naturalist thinks she must bring them home for food; and another supposes that she places them



HANGING NESTS.

there to dazzle the eyes of the bats, who will, if they can, prey upon her young ones.

This little sparrow is easily tamed, and may be taught to fetch and carry, like a carrier-pigeon. Once upon a time, the owner of a tame sparrow dropped his ring over the mouth of a well; and the bird instantly flew down, and was so dexterous as to catch it in her bill before it had had time to reach the water.

It is very curious to see the pendent nests hanging from almost every tree in the forest; and often a great many nests from the same bough. A tribe of birds called orioles always hang their dwellings up in this manner. One of these birds is very common indeed in America, and her nest is the neatest and best made of any.

She begins by fastening strings of hemp or flax round the twigs, just as long as she intends her nest to be. I daresay you wonder how the bird gets her hemp. I am afraid, not very honestly. But so great is her desire to make her nest strong, that she will fly a considerable distance to the place where the people of the country are employed in bleaching hemp, and steal as many of the threads as she can carry. Her habit of doing this is so well known, that the

women keep constant watch to drive her away.

When she has stolen her hemp, and fastened it to the tree, she next weaves it together, mixing her materials with it; and these materials are nearer at hand than the hemp was. On almost every tree there grows a moss-like plant, that streams from the branches a little like a beard. This serves admirably to work up with the hemp; and she weaves it into a kind of cloth. The nest is in the shape of a pocket, and lined with down, and is always placed where the leaves hang over it, and shade it from the sun; and there is a hole on one side near the top, that serves as a door.

The oriole does not stay all the year round in America. When the autumn comes, she flies away to the south, and generally spends the winter in Jamaica, or one of the warm islands of the West Indies. She is known by a great many different names; and is sometimes called the fire-bird, because the bright orange colour of the tail-feathers flashes among the green leaves like fire.

Some birds are styled felt-making birds, because they press the material of their nest together, by

turning their bodies round and round upon it, until they have made it as tight and compact as cloth. They do not hang up their nests as the orioles do, but fix them firmly into the fork of a branch; indeed, the branch is imbedded in the nest, and you cannot pull it away without leaving a part behind.

One of these birds is called the pinc-pinc, on account of her note, and is a native of Africa. She chooses a thick prickly shrub to build in, and her nest is rather clumsy to look at. But if you could see within it you would be astonished at the workmanship. With no implements except her bill, her wings, and her feet, she has pressed and worked up the material into a cloth of the finest texture and the best quality. An old lady might well ask the question, "If these birds could not be taught to mend stockings?"

The nest has a narrow neck, through which the bird can pass in and out; and there is a little porch built outside the neck, and looking like a small nest resting against the large one. This smaller nest was supposed to be for the pinc-pinc to sit and keep watch in while his partner was hatching her eggs. But this is not the case; for both the birds sit by turns upon the eggs, and

when one is sitting the other flies away. It is, in fact, only a resting-place, where the birds may perch as they pass in and out of the nest; for if they were to perch upon the nest itself they might injure it.

Such a soft, comfortable abode as that of the pine-pine is sure to be envied by the other birds; and some, that are larger and stronger than it is, will lie in wait until the dwelling is finished, and then drive away the owners, and take possession of it for themselves. It often happens that a pair of poor little pine-pines build one nest after another, and every time are robbed of their home; and sometimes they cannot find any place to rear their young.

A traveller in Africa contrived to tame a pair of felt-making birds. He enticed them into his tent with crumbs and tit-bits; and they immediately spied out a heap of cotton and flax that lay upon the table, and that he was using to stuff birds with. It was much easier to steal his cotton than to pick the down from the branches of plants; and they carried away, in their beaks, great parcels of it, larger than themselves.

The traveller followed them to the tree where they were going to build, and sat down and

watched them. They had already laid the foundation of moss, and the branch was imbedded in it.

At first the nest looked only like a mass, rudely put together; but the mother bird kept steadily working it into shape, while her partner flew backwards and forwards to fetch cotton and flax from the traveller's table. When he came back with his load, he put it down on the edge of the nest, or else on the branch, where the mother bird could reach it; and when he was tired of flying backwards and forwards, he would help her by pressing it together with his body.

The industry of the two little birds did not prevent their having a few games at play; and they would even quarrel in sport, and one would pull down the work that the other had been doing. Then the mother bird would take offence, and fly off, from bush to bush, and her partner would begin to sing, as if to coax her back again. This soon put all to rights, and the nest-making would go on with fresh ardour.

At the end of three days, the bottom of the nest was made quite firm by being pressed, and the birds began to raise the walls. They piled tufts of cotton one upon the other; and pressed

and beat them down, until they were as hard and firm as cloth. If any piece projected, they would lace it in, with their beaks, until the wall was flat again. They also laced in the small branches that grew near; but contrived to keep the inside of the nest perfectly round. In about a week their task was finished; and when the traveller put in his finger, he found that an egg had been laid there.



CHAPTER VI.

THE CROSS-BILL AND THE LITTLE WARBLER.



WHEN I speak of the forest, you must not always think of the tropical forest, with its fantastic beauty, its peacocks, its humming-birds, and its Birds of Paradise. Nor must you always picture to yourself the bread-fruit tree, and the palms, rising in all their dignity.

In the northern parts of America, where the heat of the tropics does not extend, lie other forests, vast, gloomy, and profound. There the loud hammering of the woodpecker and the notes of summer songsters are heard, and the squirrels play about, and collect their stores of nuts against the winter. And sometimes the forest is intersected by a river; and on its margin you would find patches of green herbage, and myriads of bright and beautiful flowers. But this does not

often happen; and the forest stretches onward, and onward, and onward still, in unbroken solitude, and destitute alike of grass and flowers.

The ground is strewed with decaying leaves and dead branches that keep falling every day. And though the storm may rage and beat upon the tree-tops, and in its fury rock them to and fro, they are so matted together that it cannot penetrate beneath them. Near the ground, all is profoundly still; and not a single breath of wind can enter, to stir the dead leaves that moulder to decay just where they have fallen.

When winter comes, the trees shed their foliage, and stand bare and leafless; the birds of summer are gone, the squirrels retreat to their holes, and the wild beasts become torpid in their dens; and the snow lies smooth and unruffled, except where, here and there, is seen the foot-print of the elk or of the wolf.

Of these northern forests, the oak woods are the least dark and gloomy; for the trees stand far enough apart to allow a golden stream of light to play upon their pale-green foliage; and the wild turkeys strut about and feast upon the acorns. The forests of beech are much darker, and the sullen pine forest is darker still.



THE ELK.

The pines, clad in their heavy foliage, stand like sentinels to guard every avenue, lest the bright eye of day should peep into their solitude; and the winter snow rests upon their evergreen branches, as on a shield, and rarely touches the ground. Here, summer and winter are alike lonely; and no squirrels are to be found except they happen to be passing on their annual excursion. But a few birds come, every year, to the pine forests, and live upon the seeds that they pick out of the fir-cones; and I must tell you a little about them.

There is a bird yonder with such a curious bill

you might think it was deformed. The two parts of the bill, instead of fitting together, cross each other; and you wonder how he can gain his living with such a misshapen tool to work with. He is called the cross-bill; and his odd-looking beak is given him that he may more easily detach the seeds from the fir-cones. He grasps the cone with his foot, and digs into it the upper part of his bill, which is like a hook, and giving a jerk, forces out the seed; then with his other foot he carries it to his mouth, after the fashion of a parrot.

If he can get apples, of which he is very fond, he cuts them in two with his bill, using it like a pair of scissors, and picks out the pips, and eats them.

The cross-bills live in the pine forest during the winter, and when spring comes go further north to rear their young. But it has happened that the woodcutters, who have been felling pines in frost and snow, have found a nest of cross-bills, with young ones in it; and the poor little birds have been jerked out as the tree began to fall.

The cross-bills live in flocks; and, though so hardy, are often pressed for food in very cold weather. Then they lose all fear, and alight at

the door of the woodman's cabin, and, for want of better fare, pick out the clay with which he has plastered his logs. And so intent are they on satisfying their hunger, that he may go close to them, and even kill them with a stick.

The plumage of the cross-bill is of a brilliant crimson; but if he is kept in captivity, he loses his beauty, and his coat changes to a brownish-yellow.

Another very hardy bird, called the pine grosbeak, visits the forest in the summer, and will sometimes stay very late into the winter. He is as gaily dressed as the cross-bill, for his plumage is of a bright carmine tinged with vermilion. The two parts of his bill do not cross each other, but the upper half projects at the edges and overlaps the other. He, too, feeds upon the seeds in the fir-cone; and when he has insinuated his bill, he uses his tongue to draw them out with.

One very stormy winter, when the snow was deep upon the ground, and many birds perished with hunger, the pine grosbeaks were driven from the forests, and collected about the houses, and in the streets of the towns, in search of food. A gentleman picked up a poor little bird, so thin as

to be nothing but a bundle of feathers. He fed it, and took such care of it that it soon recovered, and grew so tame as to eat out of his hand. It used to fly about in his bedroom; and if he was not up in time to give it its breakfast, it would flutter on his shoulder, and as good as ask him for it. But if he opened his eyes, or showed any sign of being awake, the bird was pacified, and flew to the window-seat, and waited patiently until its master was dressed.

When summer came, the grosbeak wanted to go back to the pine forest. It grew restless and unhappy, and did nothing but run from one side of the window to the other, and try to force its way through the glass. It could eat as well as ever; but the house was filled with its piteous wailing, as if beseeching for its liberty.

At length the window was opened, and it was let out; but it lingered about for some time, pluming and dressing its feathers, before it took its departure.

The pine grosbeaks are very sweet songsters; and pour out their lays at sunset, and even during the night. When they are travelling in flocks, they fly at a considerable height above the forest, and chatter together as they fly. They

alight, now and then, upon the trees, and pick off the opening buds; but on the branches, or on the ground, they move by a succession of leaps.

The little pine warbler, also, visits the pine forest, and inhabits its deepest recesses, where every tree is covered with its hanging coat of moss. He darts about, from branch to branch, catching flies; and his bill is fringed with bristles, to enable him the better to secure them. There are a great many different kinds of these warblers; and one of them chooses the tallest trees, and makes its nest amongst the thickest of the foliage. It is very nimble and lively, and climbs the twigs in search of insects, examining the under side of every leaf, to be sure that none escape it; and if the insect takes wing, the bird will take wing too and seize it as it flies. Every now and then it stops to repeat its song, which consists of a few low sweet notes; and away it darts, or else hangs from the end of the branch, as the warblers all have the habit of doing.

It is not easy to find the nest of the pine warbler, built as it is in the deepest recesses of the forest. A naturalist took the trouble to watch one of these little birds for hours, in hopes of discovering where it lived. At length he saw

it go into a thick cluster of leaves, and he noiselessly raised his gun, and took aim at the twig. When the smoke had cleared away, he saw the twig whirling to the ground; and pulling open the leaves he spied the nest, so wrapped up and hidden, that it was difficult even then to find it. The parent birds hovered over his head, and bewailed the loss of their home with such piteous cries, that he had not the heart to take their little ones away, but set them down unhurt upon a log, and contented himself with stealing only the nest.

The warblers do not stay all the winter in the forest; they are driven out by the cold, and seek a warmer spot. But in the spring they come back again, and pass over the country in a little army. Sometimes they are stopped on their way by a return of cold weather; and then they make a halt, and wait patiently until it is gone. On such occasions they may be seen flitting about in every gleam of sunshine, and are so tame that many of them have been caught by the hand. As soon as the weather changes they take wing again, and continue their flight until they are lost in the gloomy shades of the pine forest.

Before we quit the pine forest, I ought to

describe a terrible scene that occasionally takes place there; I mean a fire.

The sap of the fir-tree is, as you know, of a resinous nature, and very inflammable. The lightning will strike a tree and ignite it, or a dead trunk will fall, and rub against its neighbour until fire is produced. Then the dry leaves that cover the ground kindle like tinder; the hanging moss that streams from the trunk catches fire; and the flames darting through it climb the tree, and lay hold upon the branches; and spread from one tree to another, until a whole tract of forest is in a blaze, and the heavens glow like a furnace with the light.

These fires are, as you may well imagine, very dangerous and destructive; for they sweep onward with tremendous fury, burning up everything that lies in their track. The wild beasts, and the birds, and all living creatures fly before them; and man himself cannot always escape with his life.

The settler who has cleared a space, and built his hut in the forest, is in great peril. He is roused from his sleep by the snorting and lowing of his cattle, who know by instinct the fate that threatens them. He starts up and snatches his

gun, thinking that some wild beast is causing the disturbance. Alas! it is a worse enemy than the bear or the wolf. He looks out, and sees, yonder, a line of flame advancing full upon him; and he hears the crackling of the burning brush-wood! Not a moment is to be lost. He must leave everything behind, and, on his swiftest horse, fly for his life. His only chance will be to gain the nearest lake or pool, and seek refuge from the devouring element by lying flat at its edge.

The heat and the smoke are suffocating, and showers of sparks fly over him. He looks back, and sees his hut reduced to ashes, and the fire sweeping towards him with giant strides. It is a narrow escape, but he gains the pool, and throws himself down upon its margin.

Many wild beasts are there before him, and others rush in, and stand in the water, or swim across to the opposite side. But they are too intent on their own safety to notice him.

The flames sweep round the lake, and the ashes fall in a cloud about him. All night he watches the frightful scene around. The pine trunks are left standing, like pillars of fire, or fall against each other, and send up a volume of

sparks. But the fire has passed him by, and he sees it pursuing its course in the distance. He has escaped its fury; but he has lost his hut, his cattle, and all that he possessed, and must begin the world afresh. He is too thankful for his deliverance to murmur. As soon as it is safe for him to venture, he makes his way to a part of the forest where the fire has not been. He builds another hut; the settlers in this new place listen with interest to the recital of his misfortunes, and give him all the help they can. He is able to work; and soon gets back his cattle, and the few possessions he has lost. And the tract of forest recovers from its desolation. There is a new growth of trees; and it is an extraordinary fact, that these trees are of many different kinds, but not a single pine or fir is to be found amongst them. This is one of Nature's secrets, and man has not been able to unravel it.



CHAPTER VII.

THE MOCKING-BIRD.



IF you were to ramble into the woods and thickets of America, you would be pretty sure to hear a sound a little like the mewing of a cat; and you might even look about you, and fancy that a kitten must have got lost, and be wandering among the bushes. But presently out would hop a bird, about the size of a thrush, and of very ordinary appearance, compared to the brilliant little creatures I have been describing. He has no gaudy plumage; but is dressed in plain slate colour, with a little red under his wings, and the upper part of his head black. This is the cat-bird, whose mewing note you have just heard; and his nest is almost certain to be close at hand, at the foot of a tree, or among the bushes.

You must not despise him on account of his

appearance, and the grotesque tone of his voice. He has one of the best dispositions in the world; and when you have heard a little about him, I am sure you will feel some respect for him. He is an affectionate parent, and always on the watch lest any harm should happen to his young ones; and if he thinks they are in danger, his grief is quite touching.

A mischievous stranger, passing by, may trifle with his feelings most cruelly by making a squeaking noise, in imitation of young birds in distress. This causes a great sensation in the wood; for all the birds that live there begin to think it may be one of their little ones crying for help.

The cat-bird, who is easily alarmed, hurries first to the spot, and throws himself into a violent agitation. He flies backwards and forwards, with his wings drooping, and his mouth open; and screams until he gets quite hoarse and exhausted. He never attacks any living thing, for he is as mild and inoffensive as possible; but he uses all the arts of entreaty, and seems to implore pity for what he supposes to be his little ones.

The other birds take it a great deal more coolly. They come to the place, it is true, to see what is the matter; but they seem to understand the

trick very soon, and go back to their nests, leaving the poor cat-bird still fluttering about in an agony of alarm.

You may easily imagine that a bird with such



THE CAT-BIRD.

a disposition would not behave harshly under any circumstances.

A naturalist once took two eggs out of the nest while the cat-bird was away, and put in their stead two others belonging to a thrush. He

then stood at a convenient distance, and watched to see what would happen. In a few minutes the cat-bird came back, and hopping on the side of the nest, looked earnestly at the strange eggs. They puzzled him very much indeed, and he evidently knew in a moment that they had no business there. He flew to his mate, who was not far off, and held a long conversation with her, as if he were telling her all about it. Then he returned to the nest, and taking up one of the strange eggs, he lifted it out, and laid it among the bushes; he did the same with the other; and the naturalist was so well satisfied with this behaviour, that he restored the right eggs to their place, and the mother bird came and sat upon them.

Another time the same naturalist took two of the young cat-birds from their nest, and put them into the nest of a stranger cat-bird, and then watched as before to see what would happen.

When the mother came back and found the little intruders, she turned them out without any mercy; but as they had not far to fall, they were not hurt, though they were very likely to die of cold and hunger—at least, so her partner seemed to think, for he took pity upon them, and began

to feed them as tenderly as if they had been his own offspring.

The cat-bird, in spite of his good disposition, is not a general favourite. He has a great liking for cherries and pears, and a fatal habit of stealing them wherever he can find them. In the fruit season numbers of cat-birds leave the woods, and make sad havoc with the fruit-trees in the farmer's orchard. As a natural consequence, the farmer is their deadly enemy, and shoots them down without any scruple.

The boys, too, look upon the cat-bird with contempt, on account of his mewing note. His vocal powers, however, are not confined to this one note. He tries to imitate the other birds; and as he cannot do it with the skill of the mocking-bird, he only gets laughed at for his pains. There is very little music in his performance, and it consists of a jumble of all the notes of the wood songsters, repeated over and over, as if he were determined to learn them by heart.

The sweetest musician in the forest is the mocking-bird. His voice is strong, and clear, and musical, and seems to fill the surrounding space with a flood of delicious melody. He, too,

imitates the notes of the other birds, but in a far superior manner; he actually improves upon nature, and, in his mouth, the song is richer and



THE MOCKING-BIRD.

more harmonious than when it is uttered by the original songster.

He is full of animation, as if he were inspired by his own music. He expands his wings and tail, and sweeps round and round in ecstacy; he mounts or falls as his song rises or dies away;

and exerts himself so much that any one, not seeing him, might fancy a chorus of birds were singing instead of only one.

Perhaps the best time to hear him is in the stillness of a moonlight night, when all is silent in the forest, and every bird has gone to roost; then the mocking-bird begins, and, like the nightingale, sings the whole night through.

He is an admirable mimic, and very mischievous withal, and loves to play tricks upon his feathered neighbours. He will scream like a hawk, and then they will hide themselves and fancy their enemy is upon them; or he will imitate the call of the birds to their mates, and draw them off their nests. Even the sportsman is often led astray by him, and goes in search of birds that are hundreds of miles away, fancying they are close at hand. In fact, there is no end to the mimicking powers of the mocking-bird; and the ancient Mexicans very properly called him by a hard name, that means "four hundred languages."

Besides being a musician and a mimic, the mocking-bird is in his way a hero. He fights obstinate battles with the black snake, the inveterate enemy of the forest birds; for the black

snake loves to suck their eggs and devour their young ones.

Often, when the mocking-bird is watching by the nest while his mate is sitting, there will be a rustling among the leaves at the foot of the tree; then two bright eyes will glisten through the foliage, and presently a shining body will begin to wreathe itself round and round the trunk, and slowly to ascend. It is the black snake, who has scented the eggs of the mocking-bird, and is determined to make a feast off them.

The mocking-bird gets into a terrible passion at the sight of his enemy. He darts upon him with the rapidity of an arrow, and, keeping out of the reach of his fangs, strikes him violently on the head, the part where he is most easily hurt. The snake, finding he has met his match, draws back a little, and the mocking-bird redoubles his blows. The snake seems to think he had better get out of the scrape as quickly as he can, and, descending to the ground, tries to glide away and hide himself among the bushes; but the intrepid bird follows him, and continues the battle with great animation. The snake gets decidedly the worst of it, and his powers of fascination avail him nothing. The mocking-bird seizes him by

the body, and lifts him from the ground, and then lets him drop, beating him all the time with his wings. Indeed, so fierce is his hatred, that he never rests until he has pecked him to death.

Then he flies back to the tree, and settling himself on the highest branch, pours forth a torrent of song, as if in praise of his victory.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CARPENTER OF THE WOODS.



EVERYBODY knows the woodpecker, and has, at some time or other, seen him run up the tree, and tap at it with his long bill. This is his way of getting a livelihood, —the insects that live beneath the bark serve him for food, and his bill is made as sharp and strong as a chisel, on purpose to reach them.

He finds out by instinct which tree is decayed, for there he knows he shall meet with plenty of grubs. He runs up the trunk, and holding by his hooked claws, and supporting himself on his stiff, strong tail, he gives the tree a tap. Then he listens; for his sense of hearing is so acute that he can distinguish the insects running about within the bark, and trying to make their escape. But very soon he has sliced off a piece of the

bark, and the whole colony lies open before him. They scramble here and there in terror; but the woodpecker utters a cry of joy, and begins instantly to devour them.

Quick as lightning he darts out his long tongue, transfixes an insect, and draws it back into his mouth. In a second out it comes again, takes up another insect, and is gone almost before you can see it.

This long tongue of his is so curious, that I think I must spend a few minutes in describing it to you.

It is round, and ends in a sharp bony



THE WOODPECKER.

tip, that is barbed like an arrow, and transfixes the prey very much in the same manner. Two glands, one under each ear, secrete a sticky fluid, and keep the tongue always moist; so that every insect it touches sticks to it, and is caught as effectually as if it were on the point of an arrow.

Perhaps you wonder how the woodpecker can get rid of the insect so rapidly; but his palate is fringed with a number of sharp hairs, and against these he draws the barbed end of his tongue, and scrapes it clean.

Two strong muscles run through the whole length of the tongue, and are inclosed in it as in a sheath. They are joined to the skull by another broad muscle, which contracts or dilates as it is wanted, and allows the bird to dart his tongue several inches beyond the bill, and then draw it back in an instant.

The woodpecker is very cunning in his schemes to entrap insects. He is extremely fond of ants, but he cannot easily get them; they lie hidden in their ant-hills, too deep down for him to reach, so he tries a stratagem. He goes to the ant-hill and gives a tap, in order to bring them to the surface; then he thrusts out his long red

tongue, and lets it lie quite still, so that the ants may take it for a worm. They crawl on to it; and when it is quite covered with them, the woodpecker gives a jerk, and draws it into his mouth, ants and all.

He cannot do this many times, for the ants begin to be frightened, and suspect all is not right. They retreat to their deep house again, and the woodpecker flies off to a neighbouring ant-hill to play the same trick.

And speaking of ants reminds me of something I might tell you about them.

In the tropics there is a race of large, fierce ants, that live in ant-hills as big as huts, and that look a little like them. These ants are very formidable creatures, especially when they set out on a foraging excursion. They issue from the ant-hill in an army, one rank marching behind the other, and making a regular column of ants along the path. Occasionally they reach a village, and then they enter the houses, and take them by storm, falling on the provisions, and clearing everything before them. When there is no more to be had, they march out again; and continue their excursion, plundering as they go.

As they multiply very fast in these hot coun-



ANT-HILLS OF THE TROPICS.

tries, they would become a terrible scourge if they were not held in check; and there is a bird,

called the ant-catcher, that seems to have been created for the purpose. He will sometimes run up the trees in search of them, as the woodpecker does; but more frequently a flock of ant-catchers assemble round one of the great ant-hills, and take up their abode there. They live in perfect harmony, for there is abundance of food, and no need to quarrel about it.

And when the ants go out foraging, the birds follow them, and perch upon the trees until the ants have finished their feast, and are on their way home again. Then they fall upon them, and devour them by thousands.

But to return to the woodpecker.

The woodpecker we have in England is a small bird, and makes only a tapping noise; but in the great forests of America, the traveller is often startled by a loud ringing sound, as if a giant were hammering. He looks about him in amazement, and sees immense heaps of bark lying at the roots of the trees, and chips of wood in such quantities that the invisible giant might have been at work there. He pauses and wonders. No human being is in sight, and yet the hammering goes on, blow after blow; the forest echoes with it: who can it be?

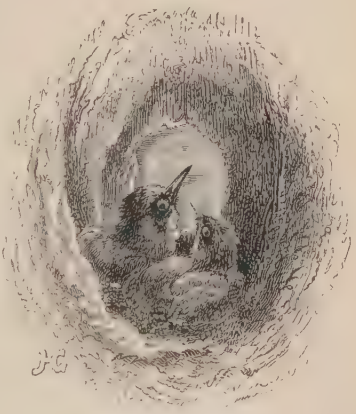
If the traveller has any knowledge, he will find out very soon that it is the great woodpecker, who is called the carpenter of the woods, and the king of his tribe. He is also named the ivory-billed woodpecker, because his bill is as white and shining as ivory; and he wears a scarlet crest, that gives him a very imposing appearance.

You must not condemn him for the havoc he seems to have made. The little grub he is hunting for does more mischief than he does. Millions of these minute creatures live between the bark and the wood, and feed upon the very vitals of the tree. Thousands of noble trees are silently destroyed by them; and the woodpecker, with his great hammering blows, is doing his best to rid the forest of its enemy. The woodpecker is very fond of the pine forests; and he splits open the fir-cones to get at their seeds. So that besides the chips of bark and wood, piles of fir-cones, picked of their seeds, may be seen lying at the roots of the trees.

His dwelling is scooped out of the trunk of a tree. He and his mate take it by turns to hammer and bore, until they have made the hole large enough. But they are very fastidious; and as making holes is such easy work, they will

often scoop out as many as twenty before they decide which to live in.

The birds of the forest find it very convenient to settle themselves in these deserted holes. But sometimes they watch him while he is boring; and the moment he has done, they fall upon him, drive him away, and take possession of his dwelling. This is very sad treatment; but the poor woodpecker often undergoes still worse. The black snake will glide up the trunk, and make its way into his peaceful abode. It sucks the eggs, or devours the young ones, in spite of the cries and flutterings of the parent birds; and then, if the hole is large enough, the black snake coils itself round, and settles there without any scruple.



NEST OF WOODPECKER.

The note of the great woodpecker is shrill like a clarion, and can be heard a long way off. His

strength is prodigious, as you may judge from the masses of bark that he slices off the trees. And his perseverance is as great as his strength; for all day long he keeps on his hammering blows.

A traveller once shot at one of these great woodpeckers, and wounded him slightly in the wing. The woodpecker was more frightened than hurt, and made a noise like the crying of a child. The horse the traveller was riding took fright at it, and reared and capered about, and nearly threw him off. But he succeeded in picking up the bird, and put it under his cloak to carry it home. All the way he went, it kept on making the same piteous cry; and as he passed along, everybody he met stopped to look at him, and thought he must be carrying a baby.

Presently he reached the town, and had to ride through the streets with the woodpecker at full cry, and the people running after him to know what it was all about. He was glad to take refuge at an inn; but his troubles did not end there.

He locked the woodpecker up in his room, while he went to see after his horse.

The moment he was gone the woodpecker set

about trying to get his liberty. He ran up the wall nearly as high as the ceiling, and began to bore away with his bill. When the traveller came back he was horrified to see the mischief the woodpecker had done. The bed was covered with pieces of plaster, and a large hole had been pecked, that would very soon have gone through the wall, and set the bird at liberty.

The traveller was, as you may suppose, very much vexed, as he would have to repair the damage. Still, he was anxious to keep his prisoner; and having caught him, he tied a string round his leg, and fastened him to the table. He then went down-stairs to find something for the bird to eat, and this time was not gone many minutes. As he came up again, his ears were greeted with a loud hammering noise, that told him the woodpecker was at work again. And he was at work to some purpose; for in that little time he had made a hole through the mahogany table.

The traveller was in despair, and almost thought of taking him back to the forest. But the woodpecker was in despair too, at not being able to get his liberty. He refused to take any food, and pined away and died.

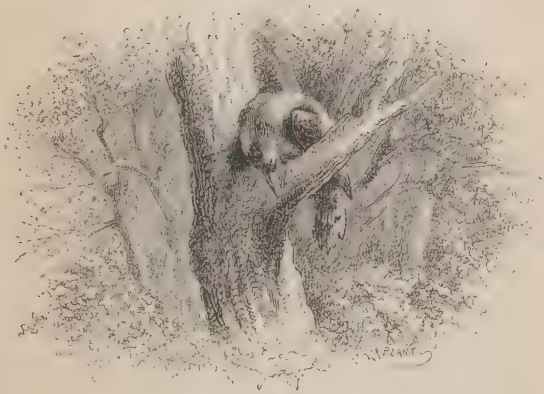
The same traveller made a second excursion

through the woods, and succeeded in catching another woodpecker of a rather smaller kind. He put it into a wicker cage, and hoped he should be able to tame it. But no prisoner in a state fortress was ever known to make more determined efforts to escape than did this child of the forest. He lost no time in fluttering about, but began to attack the wicker bars with his strong bill. He rattled, and shook, and battered them with such violence, that in a few minutes he had got out, and ran about uttering a cry something like the cackling of a hen.

The traveller mended the cage, and put him back again; but it was of no use. Every morning he was sure to find him climbing up the chairs, or running along the floor; and he was so dexterous in his movements, it was rather a difficult matter to catch him. He did catch him, however, and shut him up in a strong wire cage. Then the bird seemed to give up all hopes of making his escape, and appeared to get reconciled to his captivity. He was fed upon the young ears of Indian corn; and at night he hung by his claws from the top of the cage, and slept with his head under his wing. Before it was light in the morning he would wake up, and begin to feed

upon the Indian corn, making such a loud rapping that everybody in the house could hear it. Then he would hook himself again to the top of the cage, and finish his night's rest.

But imprisonment did not agree with him, and in a very little time he drooped and died.



CHAPTER IX.

THE OWL.



IGHT is the season of rest; and no sooner is the curtain of darkness drawn round us than the birds, who have been on the wing all day, retire to their nests to slumber, until the first rosy streak of morning shall wake them up again. But in the evening twilight, when the other birds are preparing for repose, issues forth the owl.

He has been lying hidden in the cleft of a tree, or in the tangled foliage, for his eyes are not made to endure the glare of the sun. It would dazzle him, and he would flutter about here and there, as if he were blind, or else bereft of his senses.

And he would be very unwise to venture out while the forest was astir. The birds would fall upon him, with one accord, and treat him with the utmost indignity. Even the smallest and most



THE BLUE JAY AND OWL.

feeble would peck at him, and flap its wings in his face. They know very well the owl cannot hurt them, for he is too dizzy with the light to do anything but roll his head round and round, and stare, with his great eyes, in a blind and stupid manner.

The worst of his enemies is the blue jay—a chattering, noisy bird, with a loud squalling voice, that is constantly heard in the forest. The wild deer are frightened when they hear it, and run away, to the great annoyance of the hunter; so that the hunter is a bitter enemy to the blue jay, and shoots him whenever he can find him.

The jay is both ill-natured and impertinent in his conduct to the owl. He is highly delighted if he can find out the place where he is hiding himself in the day-time, for then he can play off a few tricks upon him, without any fear of the consequences. So, no sooner has he caught sight of a round face, and a pair of staring eyes, half concealed in some thick bush of leaves and branches, than he sets up a cry that seems to say, "The owl! the owl! come and torment him!" The other birds understand the cry in a moment, and off they fly, coming from all directions, and

raising such a shout, you might hear them half a mile distant.

They have many old grudges to pay the owl, and this is the only safe time for doing it.

So they surround him, and behave just like a mob; screaming, and chattering, and fluttering their wings in his face, and even pecking at him with the utmost fury. The owl can only see very indistinctly, and is taken by surprise. He does not attempt, at first, either to move or to defend himself. He stares and goggles with his great eyes until the tumult gets past his powers of endurance, then he takes to flight, the mob following close at his heels, until they have driven him quite out of their dominions.

The blue jay, though foremost in the riot, bears no very respectable character himself. He is often seen doing exactly the same deeds of violence for which he persecutes the owl. He will kill the smaller birds, and, what is worse, plunder the nests of his neighbours, and either suck the eggs or devour the young ones, just as it may happen. He is attacked, in his turn, by the parent birds, and by a large crowd of sympathizing friends, who come to their assistance, and who have young ones of their own to defend. Then the blue jay under-



THE OWL.

goes precisely the same treatment he is so fond of bestowing on the owl, and is beaten about and driven away with every species of insult.

But when twilight steals over the forest, the owl is a different being. His eyes become full and sparkling, and glare like balls of fire. His sight is as quick now, as it was dim and indistinct before. His appetite is keen, for he has fasted all day; and woe be to the unfortunate birds who may chance to be abroad, and fall in his way! His plumage is so fine and soft that he makes no noise as he flies, and before they know he is there he pounces suddenly upon them, and seizes them with his sharp claws. But if he utters a note, his harsh, discordant voice, heard in the stillness of night, gives warning that the enemy is abroad, and they make all the haste they can to get out of his way.

The voice of the owl sounds strange and unearthly to other ears than those of the birds.

At nightfall, when the dews are dropping on the forest trees, and the fireflies flitting to and fro, the traveller is startled by what seems to him a burst of shrieking laughter. And when he is preparing to cook his supper, traveller fashion, on a wooden spit, his ears are greeted with the same unearthly sound. Presently the mystery is explained; for he sees an owl, with brown and white plumage, sitting within a few yards of him,

and staring at him with an air of profound curiosity, and as if he would have no objection to join in the repast.

The traveller would know at a glance who his visitor was. The stripes of dark brown, alternating with those of a lighter colour, show that he is the barred owl, and a very common bird in these forests.

He and his companions make a terrible din with their shrieking laughter; and if it is going to be rain they call to each other, as if to give notice, and you would think some important event was happening among them.

The gesticulations of the owl are as odd as his notes. If you go near him he bends down his head, and raises the feathers round it in a circle, until he looks as if he had a ruff on; all the while he keeps rolling his head about, until you begin to think he will break his neck. He keeps his great round eyes fixed upon you, watching your every movement, and if he suspects you are going to do him any mischief, he flies off a little way, and turns his back upon you.

As the owl has to catch his prey in the night, his eyes are formed to spy it out almost in the dark. They are of great size, and placed in the

midst of a circle of feathers, that reflect the light upon them as a reflector does upon a lamp. The great size of the pupil is, in fact, the reason why the owl is so bewildered in the daytime. It takes in too much light for him to bear, and he is dazzled by it, and driven to seek refuge in any dark corner he can find. There he sits, contracting the pupils of his eyes, and shutting out the light with his eyelids, until the twilight comes; then he dilates them to their fullest extent, and takes in the most feeble ray, and can see in places which to us would be quite dark. An owl, shut up in a barn, can spy the smallest mouse that peeps from its hole, and is down upon it instantly; so that one owl can catch more mice than half-a-dozen cats.

The eyes of the owl are protected by a bony ring, and are fixed immovably in their sockets, so that the bird cannot move them about as we do. He is obliged to turn his head towards the object at which he wants to look; but this he can easily do, for the joints of the neck are so flexible that he can turn his head right round without moving his body.

No doubt his acute sense of hearing helps the owl very much in discovering his prey. In shape,

his ears are a little like the human ear, and are covered by a lid, or flap, that he can throw open when he pleases, and thus expose a considerable surface to receive the sound.

As he sits perched on some elevated spot, his ears at full stretch, the slightest vibration strikes upon them. The rustling of a mouse, the flight of a moth, or even the movement of a worm, cannot escape his notice. He turns his head in the direction from which the sound has come, then his eyes dilate, he sees clearly what has made it, and generally seizes and devours his victim.

A subtle enemy is the owl, with his noiseless flight, his quick ear, and his watchful eye. He does not hover in the air as the kite does, or boldly hunt like the falcon; he is shrouded in darkness, and all his movements are unexpected and mysterious.

One great owl, that lives in the depths of the American forest, is called the horned owl, because of two tufts of feathers that grow one on each side of his forehead, and look like horns. He delights in the deepest solitude of the forest, where the trees are the tallest, and most thickly matted together. His loud and sudden scream cannot fail to excite a feeling of alarm, as it



HORNED AND OTHER OWLS.

breaks the silence of night; and he follows it up by a series of unearthly sounds, one of which is

like the half-suppressed cries of a person being strangled.

The Indians regard him with a superstitious dread; and their priests, who like everything mysterious, and pretend to hold communion with the spirits of the dead, have chosen the horned owl as the emblem of their office. The young priests wear a stuffed owl upon their heads, as a crest; and make it look as much like a living one as they can, by fixing glass beads in the place of eyes.

But there is nothing really mysterious about the horned owl, though his habits are gloomy, and his voice is so discordant. Like other owls, he makes terrible havoc among the smaller animals; and perhaps his strange note may be intended by nature to warn them of his coming. He is as fond of tender young chickens as the fox is, and will sometimes fly a long way to look for them.

It happened once that a horned owl, with a broken wing, was picked up and carried home by a farmer, who thought he would tame him, and make him useful in catching mice.

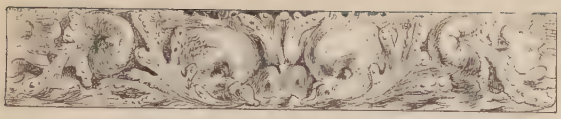
The owl was fed, and nursed, and taken care of until he got well; and then, all at once, he

disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him. What was worse, the farmer's hens and chickens began to disappear too; and at the end of a few days, scarcely one of them was left.

The farmer's wife was in great distress, and thought a fox or a weasel must have been in the roost. But one morning she got up before it was light, and went to look. To her surprise, she found the enemy was no fox, but their old friend the owl, who, at that moment, was very ungratefully feasting on one of her hens.

The owl seemed to know he was committing a crime, and tried to escape to the hole where he had been hiding. But he was soon dislodged, and killed; and his hole was found to be full of feathers and other remains of the farmer's poultry-yard.





CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT-HERON.

THE cedar swamp is different from all the other forests I have described; and yet it is included among the great forests of North America.

If the pine wood was gloomy, and the trees, with their dark foliage and unbroken shadow, struck a feeling of awe to the traveller's mind, the cedar swamp affects him more unpleasantly still.

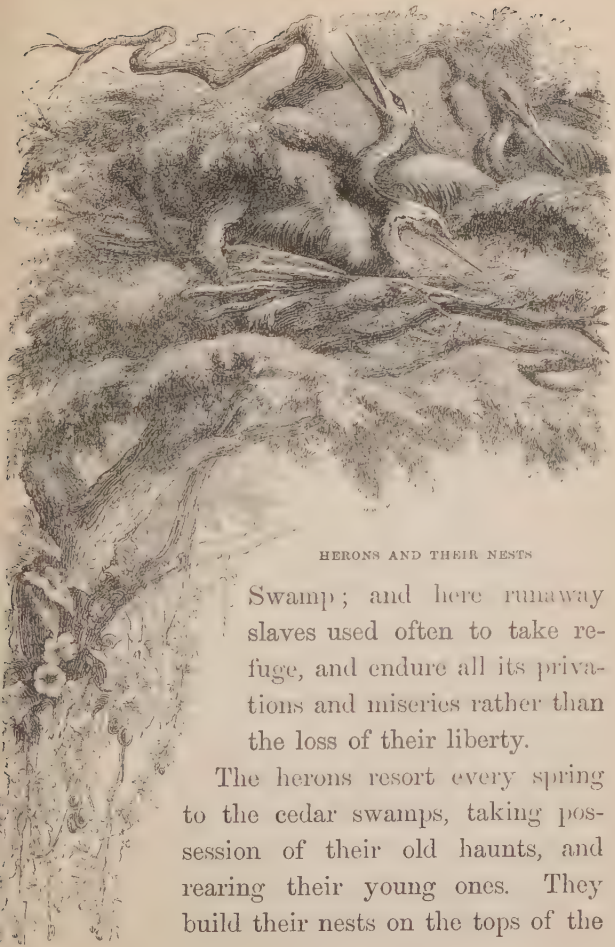
Imagine a row of tall straight trunks, sixty or a hundred feet high, and growing so close together that a man can hardly squeeze himself between. There is not a single branch except at the top, and there the foliage mats itself so thickly as to shut out the day.

The traveller making his way through a cedar swamp, must use a compass, as the mariner does

at sea; and even then he cannot always see which way the needle is pointing. The ground beneath his feet is a soft bog. The ruins of former trees lie piled in confusion, and the prostrate logs are covered with green moss, and thick bushy laurels choke up every space, and still further impede his progress. At each step he takes he sinks up to his knees in the bog, or must clamber over the fallen timber, or squeeze himself through the laurel bushes, or plunge up to his middle in ponds made by the uprooting of large trees, and which the green moss has prevented his seeing, and where, for aught he knows, the alligator may be lurking.

In calm weather the silence of death reigns in the cedar swamp, broken only by the hollow screams of the heron, and the mournful chirp of a few smaller birds. But if the wind gets up, it sighs plaintively amongst the branches; and as the gale increases, the tall stems wave to and fro, like the masts of vessels in a storm, and, rubbing against each other, make all manner of strange noises, that you might fancy were the growling and roaring of wild beasts.

There is a cedar swamp, thirty miles in length, in Virginia, known by the name of the Dismal



HERONS AND THEIR NESTS

Swamp; and here runaway slaves used often to take refuge, and endure all its privations and miseries rather than the loss of their liberty.

The herons resort every spring to the cedar swamps, taking possession of their old haunts, and rearing their young ones. They build their nests on the tops of the

tallest cedar-trees, and often repair the old dwellings, and make them do over again. The nest is made of sticks and lined with twigs, and is so large that one nest occupies a tree. The mother heron lays four eggs, rather bigger than a hen's, but with very thin shells, and of a sea-green colour. The little herons do not fly until they are grown-up; but they leave the nest in about three weeks, crawling about and clinging to the branches—always getting to the top of the tree to look out for the return of their parents. They keep up a continual croaking, and the old birds croak as well; but if a traveller comes in sight, they are all silent in a moment. The old birds rise in the air, and sail round and round to reconnoitre him, while the young ones, frightened out of their wits, scramble off in every direction. In their fright they sometimes throw themselves into the water, and swim away to hide amongst the mud, or in any hole or corner they can find.

But if the traveller retire, their fears abate; they begin to call to each other, and to peep out of their hiding-places, and before very long the croaking is as loud as ever.

The fears of the little herons are not altogether groundless; for they are much sought

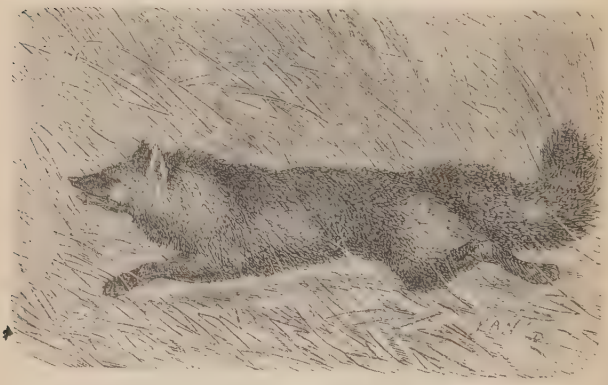
after, and thought as nice to eat as young pigeons.

The old birds are so wary, and their sense of hearing is so acute, that it is no easy matter to get near enough to shoot them. They seem to know the exact distance at which a shot can reach them; they watch all the movements of the sportsman, and, giving him the slip, fly off delighted at his disappointment. If he should happen to wound one, the bird tries to hide itself by squatting amongst the bushes; but if there is no shelter for it, it raises its crest, opens its bill, and prepares to defend itself. It will fight with its bill and claws; but its claws are so sharp and strong, that they are the most effectual weapon of the two. When fairly caught, it will utter a loud, harsh cry; and if he does not take care, it will even then elude his grasp, and make its escape.

The cedar swamp, where the herons rear their young, is as much broken and battered by them as the beech woods are by the pigeons. The ground is completely covered with feathers, old nests, and fishes, that they have dropped by accident and forgotten to pick up. If you were to go near one of these places, you would be almost

deafened by the noise; and might very well think that a body of Indians were strangling each other.

Like other night-birds, the night-herons do not see very clearly in the daytime; but their ears are as quick as those of the owl, and it is impossible to approach them without being discovered.



RACOON.

All day they are liable to the visits of the hawk, and other birds of prey, who are on the look-out to pounce upon their young ones; and even the eagle himself may be seen sailing about, taking a survey for the same purpose. At night the racoons, and many other animals, prey upon

them without mercy, so that they need all their caution and sagacity to escape.

Twilight is the time for the heron to procure his food; and no sooner has the dusk hour come than the heronry is emptied of its inhabitants, and they disperse themselves into the ponds and creeks in search of fish. Besides fish, they will eat frogs, and mice, and all manner of water-insects, and nothing comes amiss to them.

The heron wades into the water, and stands watching for his food. When an unlucky fish comes by, quick as thought he strikes it with his long bill, and swallows it head first. The frogs are more cunning, for they dive into the mud, and do not raise their heads until they think he is gone. But he is as cunning as they are. He keeps his eye fixed upon the spot where the frog has disappeared, and approaches with stealthy tread, laying his feet so noiselessly on the ground that they cannot be heard, or the vibration of them felt. When he has come near enough, he bends forward and stands like a statue, until the frog, who thinks it has waited long enough, peeps cautiously out. Then, with a shock as quick and certain as that of the rattlesnake, the heron seizes it in his bill, and devours it.

The quantity of food he can devour at one meal is almost incredible; and when he has satisfied



HERONS.

his appetite he retires to the interior of the swamp, and stands on one leg for many hours, apparently digesting his supper.

There are several species of herons; but they all live in the cedar swamps, and their habits are pretty much alike. The night-herons are called the "qua birds," because of their notes, which consist of a repetition of this sound; and when they migrate, which they do in the night, the route they take is well known by the "qua, qua," uttered at regular intervals.

Some of the trees in the cedar swamps have been occupied every spring by the herons, from time immemorial. Should any of them be cut down, the birds merely remove to another quarter of the swamp; but it has happened that, when very much teased with enemies, the whole body of herons have taken to flight, and disappeared, no one knew where.

The wings of the heron are very strong, and he can fly to a great height, and to a great distance. Then his long neck is doubled, and his head drawn in, while his legs are stretched out in a straight line behind him, and serve, like a rudder, to steer his course.

When he is angry, he sets up his crest, which consists of three long narrow feathers, that grow from the back part of the head. These feathers can be pulled from together; but if the bird shakes

his plumage, they fit into each other, and look like one. He does not get this crest, nor indeed the rest of his plumage complete, until he is three years old.

The Indians covet the long flowing feathers of the heron, and wear them to ornament their head-dresses. They offer them for sale in the markets, and Europeans are tempted to buy them. Indeed, in Persia the plumes of the heron form part of the royal coronet.



CHAPTER XI.

THE SNAKE-BIRD.

THE cypress forest is, in its way, quite as gloomy as the cedar swamp; and I should not introduce you to it, if it were not in the hope of making acquaintance with the curious snake-bird that frequents it.

The snake-bird, or, as she is more elegantly called, "the Grecian lady," loves the deepest solitude, and the most retired spot, where the busy sound of men and cities cannot reach her; and nowhere could she have found a deeper solitude than this.

Like the cedars, the mournful cypress-trees grow close and thickly together; the beard-like plant of which I have spoken streaming from their branches. Here and there are dark-coloured ponds and sluggish creeks, where alligators swim,

or lie upon the water like logs of wood. These ponds are just the places that the snake-bird loves. Do you see that pond yonder, inclosed by trees, with trees rising out of it? If you watch for a minute, you will see her seated upon one of the branches. She has a sharp bill like the heron, with a pouch something like the pelican's, but very much smaller. She has a slender neck, and a large fan-like tail. The colour of her plumage is of a dark glossy green, and her neck is spotted with white.

She has chosen a branch where she can enjoy a ray of morning sunlight; and as she stands erect, with her wings spread out, basking in the warmth, she jerks her long slender neck backwards and forwards, and her keen bright eyes glance round, ready to espy the slightest danger.

At the sound of a footstep, down she drops into the water, so noiselessly that you can hardly hear the splash. For a minute she is gone; but by-and-by her head appears on the surface. No other part of her body can be seen; and as she swims, she wreathes her long neck, and, as it rises and falls, you might very well fancy it was a snake; and this is why she is called the snake-bird.

But the naturalist, who is eager to carry home a specimen, is never so deceived. He has seen her perching on the bough, and marked her as his victim. His approach, be it ever so cautious, startles her; down she drops, leaving not a ripple in the pool, and then he knows what a hazardous chase is before him. He must creep round the pool, up to the knees in mud and marsh, regardless of alligators, gnats, and mosquitoes, till presently a slender bill divides the water, but many hundred yards in advance of him, and quite out of his reach. If his gun has wounded her as she sat upon the bough, she will drop down, and make her way, beneath the water, to such a distance, that he never sees her again. And if she cannot swim far, because of her wound, she will clutch with her feet the plants at the bottom of the pool, and remain there till life is extinct.

The snake-birds are abroad only in the daytime, and return every night to the same place to roost. In rainy weather, they sleep the greater part of the day, their heads turned over their shoulders, and making a wheezing noise as if they were snoring.

Like the heron, the snake-bird feeds upon fish; but goes a very different way to work to catch it.

She does not stand watching for it in the water, nor does she drop from a branch and pounce upon her prey; but she swims along, and dives after it as she swims. Before she dives, she opens her bill a great many times, and draws as much air into her body as she can. And when she has caught the fish, she returns to the surface, tosses it into the air, and catches it again in her bill, and swallows it.

The snake-birds build their nests in the trees of the swamp, and inhabit the same tree for a series of years. They build them in a circular form: the first layer is of dried sticks; green branches and leaves, and the long flowing moss from the tree, and a few roots, form the second layer, which is quite solid and compact. The mother bird sits upon her eggs, watching with keen eyes every movement of the kite or the crow that may be hovering round, eager to deprive her of her treasures. Her partner soars on high, with his outspread wings and fan-like tail, glancing angrily at the cowardly robbers. The circles he makes in the air grow wider and wider; he rises higher and higher, till he becomes a mere speck, and is almost lost to sight. Then, closing his wings, he rushes downward like a meteor, and

the next moment has alighted on the edge of the nest.

In about three weeks' time, the broken egg-shells float upon the green slime of the pool beneath the tree; and the nest is filled with the tender young, clothed in soft down, and with open mouths, and extended pouches, asking for food.

The mother, now, must dive for fish; she swallows it, and brings it back into her pouch and feeds them with it. Every day the young snake-birds get larger and stronger; they amuse themselves by lodging their bills on the upper part of the nest, and by this means drawing themselves up. But very soon the nest gets too small for them; and they stand upright, and flap their wings, as if to try their strength. Then the parent birds alter their behaviour. They leave off bringing food; and at length push the young ones overboard into the water beneath. But it is their natural element, and they swim about at their ease, and begin to dive after their food.

The old birds may well be in a hurry to get rid of them, as they have another brood to rear before they leave the swamp, and seek a warmer dwelling for the winter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WILD TURKEY.



IN England the cottager is roused from his slumbers by the cheerful crowing of the cock; for the cock has always been a herald of the dawn, and sets up his shrill alarum before the sun is up, and while the grass is yet dripping with the dew. He is an earlier riser than the sun; and scarcely waits until the night has taken her departure before he crows exultingly in the thought of the coming day.

The wild turkey is the herald of the dawn in his native woods. Just as the sun gilds the tops of the lofty trees, and gleams upon the blossoms of the magnolia, the turkey gives him a salutation. Then another turkey, in a neighbouring tree, catches up the watchword and passes it to another; and so on, till the forest rings with the sound,

and all living creatures wake up, and come forth to another day of life and enjoyment.

The turkey is a splendid bird, and you can have but little idea of him from seeing him in a tame condition. He has got weak and de-



WILD TURKEYS.

generate, and lost much of his sharpness and sagacity, and his plumage is not half so brilliant. In his native woods, it gleams with a rich golden bronze, and is tinged with blue, violet and green, each feather ending in a black band of metallic

lustre. Then he is much larger and stronger; and when he is brought into the poultry-yard, heartily despises his domesticated kinsfolk. Indeed, he becomes quite a tyrant, and drives them about just as he pleases.

I will give you a little sketch of the turkey's life and manners in his native forest.

He is very fond of acorns, and thrives upon them so well as to get extremely plump and handsome. But his love for acorns leads him, every now and then, to take a long journey. When they are abundant in any particular part of the forest, one turkey brings the news of it to the rest, and the whole flock set off on an excursion there. They travel on foot, and get over the ground very fast with their long straggling legs. But sometimes they have to cross a river in their way, and this is rather an undertaking. There seems a great bustle among them, and a consultation takes place as to the best means of proceeding. The old birds give themselves airs, and strut about, making a gobbling noise, as if they were telling the rest not to be afraid. And the young ones begin to strut about as well, and to boast of their courage; although they take good care to keep at a distance from

the turkey-cocks, who have an unpleasant habit of knocking them on the head and killing them.

At length they all fly up to the top of the highest tree, and wait there until one who is the leader gives a signal, and then the whole flock take wing. As the river is often more than a mile wide, it is rather a fatiguing flight for them. The old ones manage it pretty well, but the young ones get tired, and are apt to fall into the water; they swim for their lives, but the current often carries them away from the shore, even when they have reached it. They struggle very hard, and sometimes succeed in climbing the bank, though wind and tide are against them. But if they are exhausted with swimming, their strength fails, and they are drowned.

When the turkeys have crossed the river, they wander about for a little time before they proceed, as if to recruit. And the Indian hunter, who calls this month his turkey-month, comes upon them, and kills a great many of them; though they are very thin, and in poor condition, compared to what they will be when they have fattened on the acorns.

At last the turkeys reach the land of plenty; and they disperse in flocks, and feed upon the acorns.

When the spring comes, then comes also the process of building the nest, and rearing the young ones. This falls entirely to the lot of the mother bird, and is rather a difficult affair for her to manage. Her partner is of a jealous disposition, and extremely selfish. He likes to have her strut about with him in the forest, and bestow all her time and attention on himself. So he does not wish her to make a nest, and breaks her eggs whenever he can find them. In consequence of this unamiable trait in his character, the mother bird is driven to build her nest in some secret place, and not let him know where it is. She makes it of dried leaves, and generally places it on the ground, by the side of a log, or dead tree that has been beaten down by the wind. All the time she is doing it, her partner wonders where she is gone; and calls out to her with a loud gobble. But she keeps quite quiet, and makes no response.

At night, the hen turkeys roost together on the same tree; and if one utters a call, her partner, who is roosting not far off, answers her; and the rest take up the note, one after the other, in quick succession, until sometimes the forest resounds for miles with their strange gobbling voices.

When the mother turkey has made her nest—and this does not take her long—she has to lay her eggs, and hatch them. Her maternal affection is unwearied, and it is often severely tried; she is surrounded by enemies, and must guard her eggs with the utmost vigilance. To say nothing



WILD CAT.

of her partner, who would delight to crush them if he could, there is the cunning lynx and the wild cat, prowling in the branches overhead, and peering through them with fierce bright eyes. There is the snake, always watching an opportunity to gratify his love for eggs and well-known propensity to steal them. And last, but not less

mischievous, there is the crow, perched upon the tree close by, and only waiting till the mother turns her back, to be down upon her nest, and despoil it. He would carry off every one of her eggs, and hide them in some safe place, that he might devour them at his leisure. So if she leaves her nest only for a few seconds, she covers it carefully over with dried leaves, that it may not be distinguished from the mass of withered foliage around it. And when she comes back, she takes a different path, so that there may be no beaten track to point out the way to it. And if, when she is sitting, the wolf or the fox, or even the hunter, pass by, she crouches down as low as possible, and tries not to be seen.

And sometimes, as if the mother birds sympathized with each other in their domestic troubles, they unite, and lay their eggs in one nest, and rear their broods together. Then they are quite safe; for one turkey mounts guard, and if an enemy approaches, she gives warning to the rest; and they are generally more than a match for him, let him be whom he may.

But if no accident happens, and the eggs escape the fox, and the lynx, and the rest of their enemies, by-and-by the young brood come out. Then the

mother is amply rewarded for all her care. And how rejoiced she is! She strokes them with her bill, as they totter out of the nest, and caresses them in a most tender and affectionate manner; and keeps softly clucking, for that is her way of telling them not to leave her side.

They are very delicate little creatures, and have no feathers at present, but only a covering of soft hairy down, that is no protection from the wet. Rain or damp would be fatal to them; so the mother leads them to the driest and most sheltered part of the wood, and at night nestles them beneath her wings. In the daytime, she walks before them, stretching her neck from side to side, as if to spy out an enemy. And if an enemy comes in sight, she utters a peculiar note, that gives warning to her young ones to run and hide themselves.

A turkey was one day strutting about at the head of her brood, looking very proud and happy. Suddenly she glanced at the sky, and uttered a most piercing scream. The little ones immediately took fright. Some of them skulked down, and tried to hide themselves in the grass; and the rest stretched themselves out at full length on the ground, and lay motionless as if they were dead.

All the time, the mother kept on screaming, and looking intently into the sky. Nothing was to be seen except a black spot, just under a cloud. But the black spot came nearer and nearer, and turned out to be a hawk. He swept round and round the frightened group, and at length hovered right over them. The little ones seemed to be dead, for they never moved; while the mother kept her eyes fixed upon the enemy, and tried to scare him with her hideous screams. Perhaps she succeeded, or else he was deceived, and fancied the young turkeys were really dead. At all events, after keeping them in suspense a very long time, he seemed to change his mind, and flew off in another direction.

Then the turkey altered her note to one of rejoicing; and up started her little ones in an instant, as though they had suddenly come to life again. They crowded round her, still trembling with fear, and expressed, by a variety of sounds, their joy at having escaped.

In process of time, the young turkeys grow great birds, with strong muscular legs that can run very fast. They are quite able to take care of themselves, and the mother turns them adrift. Their wings are not yet large enough to fly with,

but they can scramble up the trees, and so escape from many of their enemies ; as, for instance, the fox and the wolf, neither of whom can climb. The lynx still continues their most dangerous foe, and I will tell you how he often serves them.

When they are wandering in the forest in search of food, he prowls about them, keeping them in sight with his keen eyes. He watches to see which way they are going, and follows in the rear, looking very innocent, and as if he happened to be there by the merest accident. But by-and-by he makes a little circuit, and gets before them unawares. Then he lies in wait for their coming, crouching in the path, with his back up, and his tail waving backwards and forwards. His patience is not tried very long. Up come the turkeys, who, having missed him, suppose they shall see nothing more of him. But they are soon aware of their mistake. There is a spring, a scuffle, a faint gobble, and off trots the lynx with a fine young turkey in his mouth !

The rest of the brood are sorely discomforted, and run gobbling about in great confusion, looking very red and excited. But it is all of no use ; their companion is gone for ever !

Another subtle foe of the turkey is our old

friend the barred owl, who likes the taste of turkey as much as the lynx does. He hovers over the flock, when they have gone to roost, his head bent, and his great eyes fixed upon them, as if he were making up his mind which he should like the best. But noiseless as are his pinions, the quick ear of the turkey is almost sure to detect him. He rouses himself in a moment, and calls out to his neighbour, by a cluck, and bids him take care, for "the owl is abroad!" and the cry of danger runs through the whole flock.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and the turkeys, put upon their guard, know exactly what to do. They start to their legs, and watch every movement of the owl. In another second down he comes, swift as an arrow, and takes full aim at one of them. But the turkey aimed at drops his head at that identical moment, squats close to the branch, and spreads his tail over his back like a shield. The owl, who comes full drive, glances over the shield; and before he discovers that he has missed his mark, the turkey has thrown himself head first to the ground, where he lies, still sheltering himself with his tail, very much frightened, but not in the least hurt.

As for the owl, he is bitterly disappointed, and

wheeling round, sails up into the air again. I daresay he makes another trial; but the turkeys are so fully prepared for his attacks, that he is very likely to lose his supper, or be driven to seek it somewhere else.

The turkey's great security lies in the strength and swiftness of his legs. It is impossible to catch him by running; and he often baffles the hunter, as well as the owl and the lynx, and tantalizes him beyond all endurance.

If a sportsman happens to be driving, and a flock of turkeys to be roaming that way (for they are restless birds, and scattered everywhere), they do not trouble themselves about him, and keep close under his horse's feet. But if he takes up his gun and gets out, thinking it will be very easy to shoot them, off they scamper, and skim along the ground with such rapidity, that before he has time to raise his gun they have disappeared, and there is nothing for him to fire at.

So he is obliged to have recourse to a stratagem. He goes into the forest at night, when the turkeys have gone to roost, and imitates the cry of the barred owl. He soon finds out where they are, for at this dreaded sound they rouse themselves, and begin to cluck. Then the hunter goes up to

the tree, and fires at them. By a kind of infatuation, the report of the gun does not seem to frighten the turkeys. It is enough for them that no owl is in sight; and they keep their places, though their wounded companions are dropping from the boughs beside them.



INDIANS HUNTING TURKEYS.

One of the pleasures of Indian life is hunting the turkey; and the Indians, who dearly love finery, adorn themselves with the feathers. The women make smart fans and head-dresses of the tail; and also cloaks and mantles of the fibres of the birch, with the turkey's feathers woven in, putting the bright colours on the outer side.

But I have said enough about the turkey. I daresay you have always thought him a vain and stupid bird; and so he seems to be in the poultry-yard, with his odd, pompous ways, and his tyranny over the weaker fowls.

You will see, however, that the turkeys in their wild state are not without their good qualities. The friendship and watchfulness they display for each other, and the care of the mothers for their little ones, are enough to redeem the turkey character from contempt.

Indeed, the great Franklin always regretted that the turkey had not been placed on the American banner instead of the eagle, as he considered him by far the most respectable bird.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING OF THE BIRDS.

THE birds I have been describing to you are all birds of the forest, and live in its deep solitude, and nestle in the foliage of its lofty trees.

But it would not be paying proper respect to the royal eagle, the king of the birds, to leave him out, though he does not always make his abode there. His nature leads him to mount upwards, as if to the sun, and he soars aloft to a vast height, and surveys the forest stretched at his feet; and yet so piercing is his sight, that from his exalted position, where he looks a mere speck, he can clearly discern the animal or bird that will suit his appetite, and pounces down upon it with unerring certainty

His keen vision and strength of wing render the eagle an object of terror to the feathered

tribes; and at any time, and wherever they may dwell, they are liable to fall into his clutches. His dominion is everywhere. Lakes and rivers, the mighty ocean, the steep mountain, or the peaceful valley, are alike to him. He is king both of the forest and the desert, and none dare resist his sway.

It is a pity that the eagle, to his kingly attributes of strength and daring, does not unite a generous disposition, for then he would be a worthy monarch. But he is ferocious and tyrannical, and his temper is always showing itself in his actions. I will give you a scene or two out of his life, just to show you his character.

He is perched on the top of a lofty tree, near to the sea-shore; and, half-hidden in his leafy bower, he remains quite still, and gives no sign of his presence, either by look or gesture; but his quick ear catches the slightest sound, and his keen eye takes note of everything that is passing around him.

The sea-gulls fly here and there, or skim upon the surface of the water. The crane is wading out in search of prey, or standing motionless to watch for its coming. The crows are clamouring from the trees or cliffs. All are busy and active,



THE EAGLE.

and unsuspicious of danger; and the eagle keeps his station, and does not interfere with any of them.

But suddenly his eye kindles, and he balances

himself with half-opened wings, as if about to fly. There is a bird hovering over the sea that arrests his attention. He knows what bird it is, by his wheeling round and round, and then poising himself in the air. It is the fish-hawk, come to catch a fish for his dinner; and this is what the eagle has been waiting for. He likes fish as well as the hawk, but he does not choose to dive after it. He knows an easier method, and intends to disappoint the hawk of his prey, and get the fish for himself.

Down comes the hawk as swift as lightning, and dashes into the sea, making the waves foam round him. The eagle is all excitement. He levels his neck and spreads his wings, as if impatient for pursuit. In a few seconds the hawk reappears, with a fish struggling in his talons; and, mounting in the air, he utters a scream of joy at having obtained his prize.

But his triumph does not last long. The pinions of the eagle cleave the air; he gives chase; and the hawk, knowing what is about to befall him, darts upwards and upwards, and tries to keep over his enemy's head. The eagle mounts upwards too, and the struggle begins in earnest. The birds wheel round and round like

two skilful warriors, the hawk parrying the attacks of the eagle, and both performing a series of graceful manœuvres.

But the hawk has the fish in his talons, and the eagle has nothing to carry; so the eagle gains on his opponent, and comes close up to him. Another moment, and he will seize him. Then the hawk thinks only of his life, and, uttering a scream of despair, he drops the fish. This is just what the eagle wants him to do. He poises himself a moment, then darts upon it, catches it as it falls, and flies away with it to his nest.

The fishermen on the coast watch these contests with interest. Their sympathies are on the side of the hawk, who is a great favourite of theirs. He is the herald of the fishing season; and when they see him hovering over the sea, they know that the shoals of herrings and other fish have arrived too; and they never begrudge him his share.

The treatment he receives from the eagle is certainly very unjust; but perhaps the royal bird thinks he has a right to the fish as a perquisite. At all events, he does not scruple to carry out the principle of might against right.

The eagle does get punished sometimes, and



EAGLE AND FISH-HAWK.

very deservedly. The hawks, out of patience at being cheated of their prey, unite, and drive him from the neighbourhood. Then he is obliged to hunt for himself, and goes inland, and destroys numbers of the smaller animals, such as pigs and lambs, and even sheep. Ducks and geese, and every kind of fowl, fall victims to his appetite; and the farmer, in that part of the world, dreads the eagle quite as much as he does the wolf.

But I can give you another scene from the life of the eagle.

You must imagine a broad river, almost like a sea, and its surface covered with myriads of water-fowl, skimming about and enjoying life after their own fashion. The alligator may lurk among the reeds, and the hawk or the eagle be close at hand; but none of these enemies are in sight, and the scene is one of peace and apparent security.

And yet all this time the eagle is at hand. He is perched upon a tree, on the margin of the stream; and, unobserved, looks down with a fierce, stern glance. The ducks and geese pass by, but he makes no movement: they are not worthy his notice. He is waiting for a richer prize; and his mate, who occupies a branch of a

tree on the opposite bank, keeps uttering a peculiar call, as if telling him to be patient.

Presently a trumpet-like note is heard, and a large white bird comes flying heavily along. It is the trumpeter-swan—so called from her peculiar note; and the female eagle sets up a shriek of triumph, while her partner opens his wings, ruffles up his feathers, and puts himself in an attitude to make an attack.

The swan seems to suspect some danger. She looks about from side to side, and tries to hasten her flight. She flaps her large wings, but they can hardly support the weight of her body, and she makes very little progress. She will have to pass the spot where the fierce birds are sitting, and her only refuge will be to plunge into the water and dive out of sight. But just at this moment the eagle starts from his perch, and gives a scream that is full of terror to the ear of the poor swan. He glides through the air like a falling star, and quick as lightning darts beneath her, so that she may not drop into the river. She mounts upwards, doubles about, and tries every means to elude him. But her courage soon fails her; each time she attempts to force her way to the stream, she is met by the savage glance and

threatening talons of the eagle. She may well give up all hope of escape. It is an unequal contest, and cannot last long: the fate of the poor swan is sealed!

The eagle, like all the birds of prey, is armed by nature with peculiar terrors to his victim, and the swan has almost ceased to breathe when he seizes and drags her to the shore.

Then the female eagle, who has taken no part in the conflict, comes to share the booty; and together they regale themselves on their prize.

When the eagle is very hungry, he will so far descend from his dignity as to feed upon dead animals—thus putting himself on a level with the vultures. An abundant supply of this kind of food is every now and then thrown in his way, as you shall hear.

At a certain season of the year, the squirrels move from one part of the country to the other, as the birds do. They are so bent upon this journey, dictated to them by instinct, that no obstacle stands in their way; but, like a brave little army, they hold on in spite of every difficulty.

You would wonder how they can contrive to cross the mighty rivers that intersect the country,

and it is rather a puzzling matter. When they come to the bank, and see how deep and wide the river is, they make a halt, and seem to consider what is best to be done. After a little delay, they march back into the wood; but you must not think they have abandoned the enterprise.



SQUIRRELS CROSSING A RIVER.

So far from this, they are only gone to find something to make a raft; and presently the whole army marches out again, each squirrel carrying a strip of bark that is to serve him as a boat.* He sits upon it, and then launches it into the stream;

* Linnæus relates this of the squirrels in Lapland.

and in this way a fleet of squirrels push off into the middle of the river.

But the ingenious little creatures do not always come to land so safely as one could wish. The slightest gust of wind shipwrecks thousands of them; and their dead bodies are thrown upon the shore. Then the vultures, who have been on the look-out, expecting the catastrophe, assemble in great numbers to devour them.

But the eagle has been upon the look-out too, and comes sailing to demand his right. The vultures show some good manners on the occasion, though not with any alacrity. When the eagle alights among them, they make way for him, and retire to a little distance; where they perch upon the trees in sullen silence, waiting until he has finished, before they commence their meal.

The cataract of Niagara yields an abundant supply of provision for the eagle, as bodies of all kinds are whirled over the edge of the fall. Numbers of eagles congregate there, as if they delighted in the roar of its mighty waters; and fly in and out of the spray that rises like a column, and sometimes hides them from view.

The nest of the eagle, which is called an eyrie, is built on a steep rock, or else upon a lofty tree,



EAGLE'S NEST.

such as a pine or a cypress. The same nest does duty year after year, only it is put in repair, and

new sticks are added, until it gets so large that it can be seen a long way off. There is generally but one egg in it, and never more than two. The parent birds are devotedly fond of their young; and as I have said so much of the ferocity of the eagles, it is but fair to give this better side of their character.

It happened once that a part of the forest had to be cleared, and the easiest way of doing it was by setting the trees on fire. On the top of a pine-tree was the great nest of the eagle, and the young bird was in it. The pine-tree, in its turn, caught fire, and the flames rapidly mounted the trunk. But the mother eagle would not leave her nest, although she was in danger of being suffocated. At last the nest itself was in a blaze, and she was compelled to abandon it. But she hovered over it, and several times flew in and out of the flames, until her wings were scorched; and again and again she tried, though in vain, to save her little one.

There is a beautiful allusion in the Bible to the eagle's care for her young: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead them."

When the young eagles are ready to leave the nest, the parent birds teach them to fly by making small circles in the air at midday, rising toward the sun. The young birds imitate them; and the old ones pause upon the wing, until the young ones have accomplished their first flight. They then make a second and a wider circle, mounting higher, and getting nearer and nearer to the sun The young ones follow them, and fly stronger and better as they rise; until at length they look like tiny specks, and indeed wholly disappear.

The young eagles fare sumptuously so long as they are in the nest. The parents bring them more food than they can eat, and fragments of fish, flesh, and fowl lie scattered round the tree; so that an eagle's nest can be scented at a great distance. As soon as the young eagles can fly, their parents consider them able to get their own living, and do not choose to be burdened with them any longer. They turn them out to shift for themselves; but the eaglets do not always wish to go, and come back again, wanting to be taken in. Then the old birds push them off the nest, and will have nothing to say to them. The utmost favour shown them is permission to roost upon the branches close by. But in a few

weeks they get more courageous, and go into the world to seek their fortunes.

I have mentioned the forest being on fire, and the rushing of all living creatures to get out of the way of the flames.

But there is another event that occasions quite as much dismay in the forest. It is after an unusually heavy rain, when the mighty rivers of America overflow their banks, and cause a flood. The flood spreads over miles of country, and overwhelms the forest; rising and rising, until it looks like a vast lake, and the trees seem to be growing out of the water.

Then there is a terrible scene of confusion. The monkeys climb to the highest branches, and survey the desolation beneath; the birds flutter about, screaming with despair as their nests are carried away by the water. The larger animals struggle to escape; but many of them are drowned, or fall victims to the alligator, who is swimming about amongst the trees. Above all tower the eagle and the vulture, making the most of the general calamity, and satisfying their rapacious appetites.

For a time chaos seems to reign. But the flood retires, and Nature makes haste to repair

the mischief. The trees wear a brighter foliage, the flowers spring in greater profusion from the moist earth. The wild beasts go back to their haunts, and the birds build their nests and flutter again amongst the branches.

Order is restored, and life goes on as it did before in the forest.

"O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."

"Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.

"The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens..... These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season."



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